



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



Ang. 39.65



Harvard College Library.

COLLECTION OF BOOKS ON ANGLING, ETC.

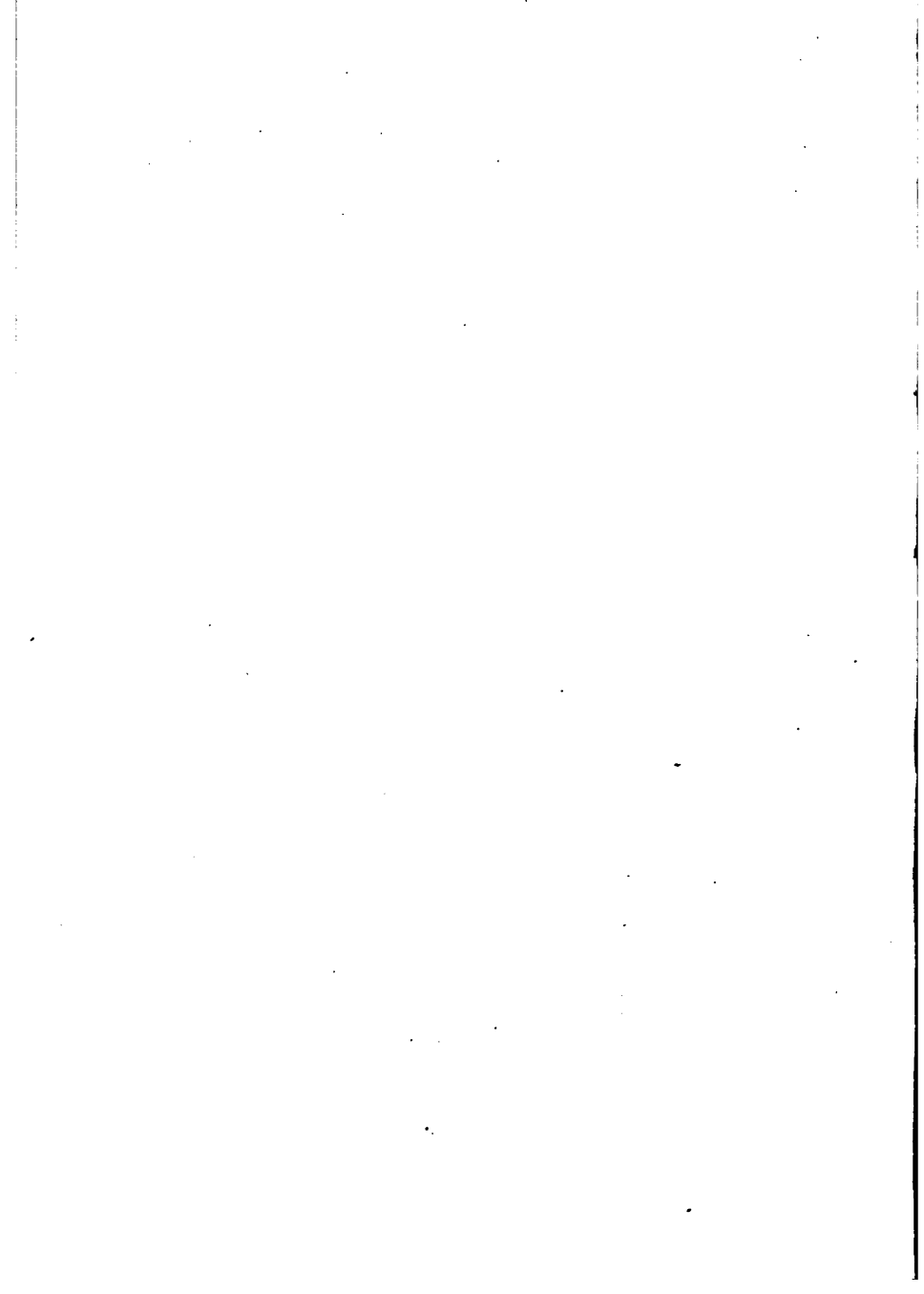
GIVEN BY

JOHN BARTLETT,

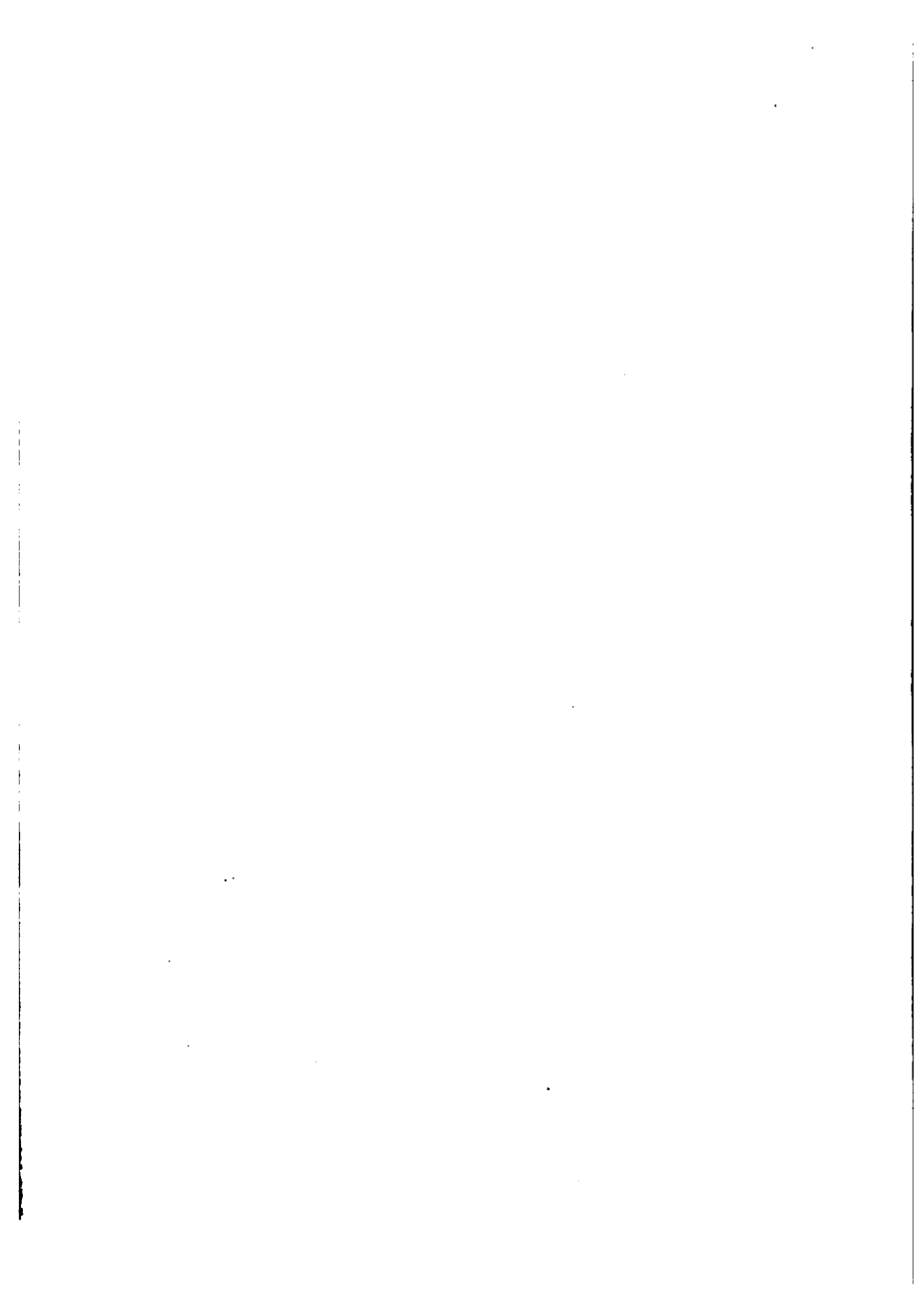
(A. M. 1871.)

Nov. 17, 1892.



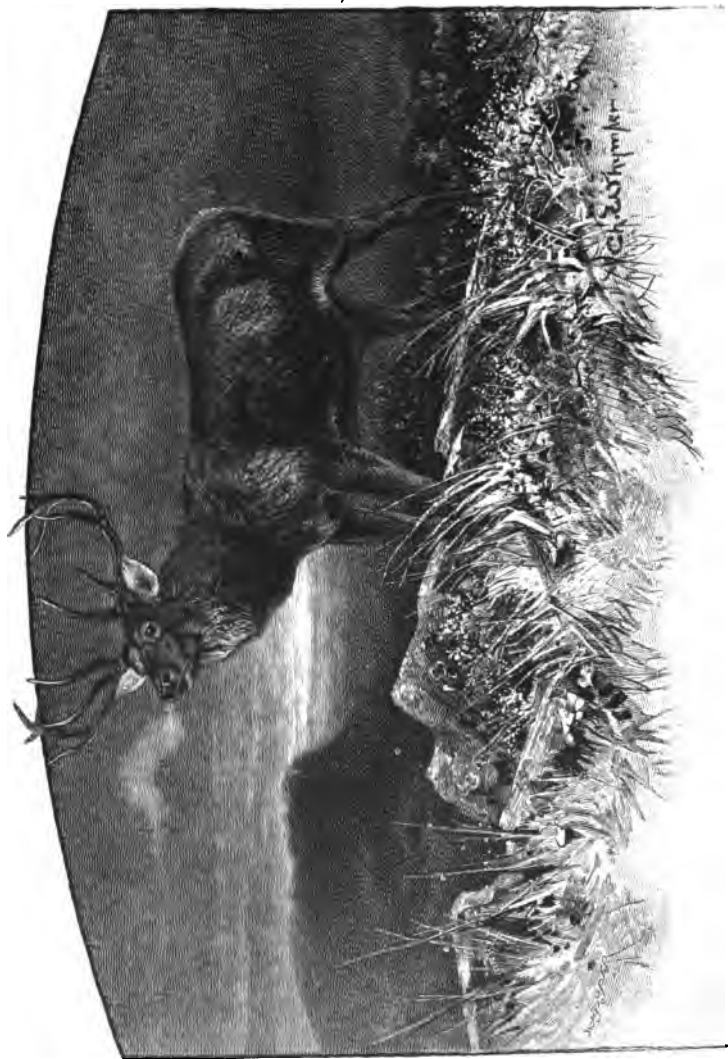






SPORTING TALES

LONDON : PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET



'Then an angry bellow rang out with a startling suddenness through the chill grey air, and a fine stag stepped down from the higher curtain of mist'

1. HOLLAND (1410-1411)

1. HOLLAND

1. HOLLAND
1. HOLLAND

1. HOLLAND



A HIGHLAND GATHERING

BY

E. LENNOX PEEL

WITH 31 ILLUSTRATIONS ENGRAVED ON WOOD BY E. WHYMPER

FROM ORIGINAL DRAWINGS BY CHARLES WHYMPER

LONDON
LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
1885

All rights reserved

Aug. 39.65

Harvard College Library.

17 Nov. 1892.

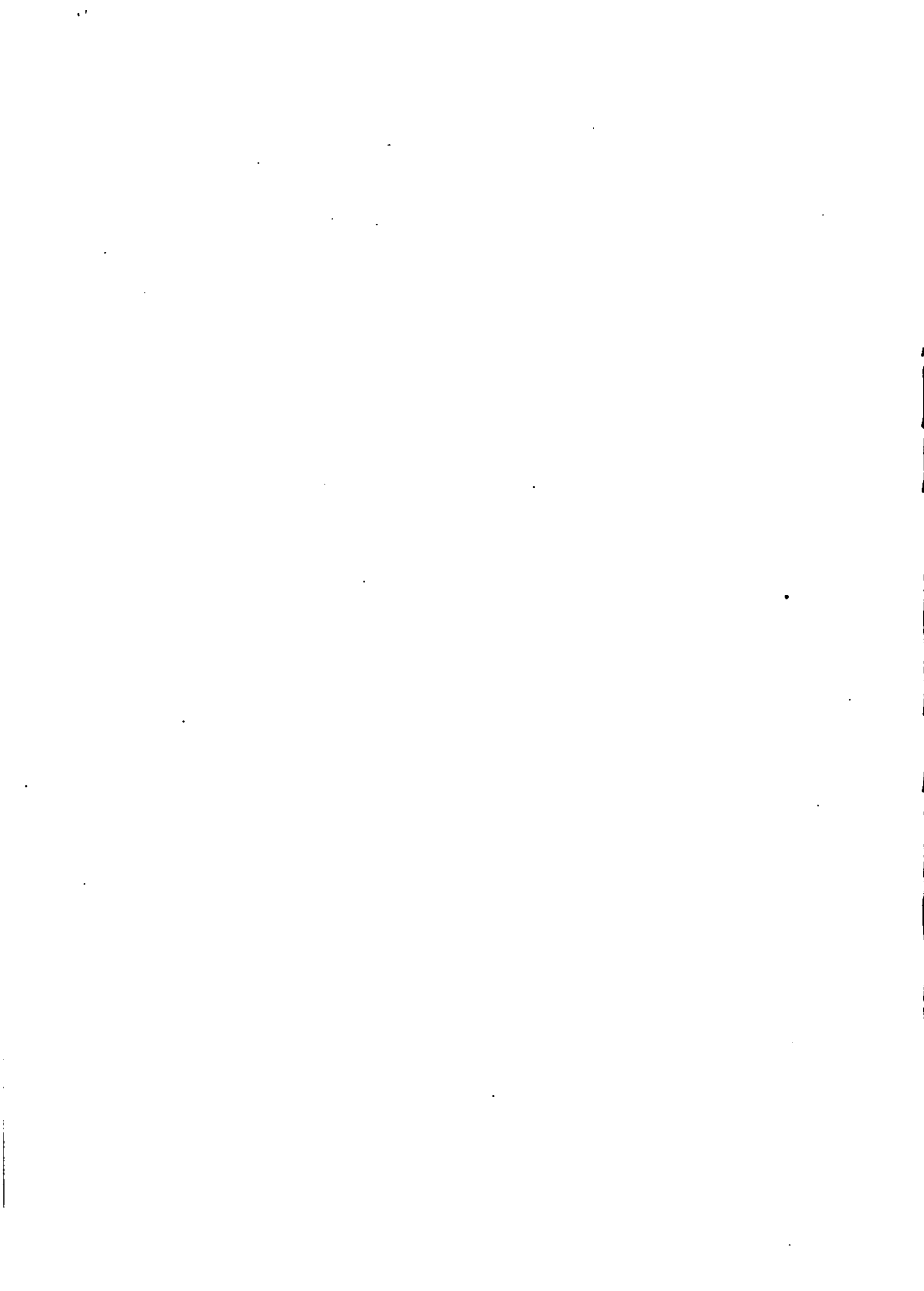
Gift of

JOHN BARTLETT,
of Cambridge.

TO
SIR JOHN KINLOCH, BART.
of Kinloch

A THOROUGH SPORTSMAN AND A GOOD FRIEND

THIS SMALL BOOK
IS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED



PREFACE.

FOR PERMISSION to republish the majority of these papers I am indebted to the kind courtesy of Mr. J. WATSON LYALL of the *Whitehall Review*, well known for his excellent *Sportsman's Guide*. I owe a similar acknowledgment to the Proprietors and Editor of *Land and Water* for three of the articles; and 'The Children of the Mist,' 'That Big Trout,' and 'The Lone Glen' have already found, in the pages of *Longman's Magazine*, 'a local habitation and a name.'

If these slight stories do happen to find favour in the eyes of a discriminating public, this gratifying result will be mainly owing to the graceful yet

vigorous sketches by Mr. CHARLES WHYMPER, who has followed the main incidents with sympathetic humour and the eye of an artist. The Author is keenly alive to his good fortune in meeting with so gifted a *collaborateur*.

1885.

CONTENTS.



	PAGE
THE STALKER'S TALE	I
AN ANGLER'S DREAM	13
CRAIG-EN-GASH	25
'A STAG OF TEN'	41
THAT BIG TROUT	57
NORTHWARDS AGAIN	67
BEFORE THE DAWN	79
THE LONE GLEN	95
SPRINGTIME BY THE RIVER	111
THE CHILDREN OF THE MIST	119
A DAY ON SHEEPGROUND	133
THE FORESTING OF STRATHBRACKEN	149
ON LOCH LYDOCH	161
HIND SHOOTING	169

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.



	PAGE
‘Then an angry bellow rang out with a startling suddenness through the chill grey air, and a fine stag stepped down from the higher curtain of mist’ <i>Frontispiece</i>	
‘Well, he just looked fair at us, startled like’	5
‘He passed away out of my sight among the birch- and rowan-trees’	11
‘A great wave rises up on the stillness of the nearer water, and a fish full twenty pounds weight flings himself exultingly into the air at my very feet’	16
‘There is a splash as if of a whale’	23
MacIannan prepares to go into action	29
‘The figure of a man comes suddenly into view against the sky’ .	35
A shot at the running-deer	37
MacIannan relieves his pent-up emotion	39
A lift on the deer-saddle	45
‘And forth the three crept beyond the knoll’	49
‘You keep a big humble-bee flopping up and down on the top of the water, and if you only make it look lifelike enough, you’ll get him one of these days’	66
‘I am Mr. Simpson and party’	75
‘The cock grouse came out and strutted on a neighbouring hillock’	85

	PAGE
' . . . the unexpected framework of a large white parasol, underneath which there rose up, slowly and by jerks, a stout old lady wiping the perspiration from her dewy brow '	105
Duncan's anguish	110
A couple of startled landrails	113
The uneasy mother	115
A loving couple	118
Charlie thinks he sees something	125
In sight of the deer	129
The deer-pony	135
' By this time I was quite listless and dispirited '	138
The Death of the Nine-pointer	145
' And now in this rough weather the stags would feed side by side with the sheep '	155
' The whistle of a teal's wing '	163
The Deer's worst Enemy	171
' Black and gaunt against the drifted snow '	177
' One or two lots of ptarmigan rise before us into the air '	180
Clifford athirst for blood	183
Finis	185

THE STALKER'S TALE



THE STALKER'S TALE.

I REMEMBER with pleasure the midday rest for lunch on one of the hottest days last August. Fatigued alike with the rather poor success after grouse in Glen Brayne, and with the unusual heat of the day, we found a most charming spot beside a burn ; and under the delicate shade of birch- and rowan-trees I heard the stalker's tale.

It was after we had finished our lunch that our three stalwart henchmen, who sat somewhat apart on an adjacent knoll, began such an animated discussion, over their pipes, on some topic evidently of great interest to themselves, that the curiosity of our host, Mr. Roberts, was at last aroused ; and he called over to them in his affable yet somewhat lordly fashion :—

‘Well, my lads, what’s all this talking about ? It should be interesting to judge from your faces. May we be permitted to share the secret ?’

The two gillies looked with one consent at Ross the stalker, as at the Mercury, or chief speaker, of the party ; and so he, after one or two ineffectual

pulls at his pipe, which had been suffered to go out during the heat of the argument, took up the story and thus began :—

‘ Well, sir, I doubt not you will have heard before now that each forest has its “ muckle hart,” as they call it hereabouts. That’s just one grand stag which is supposed to haunt the place and bear a sort of charmed existence. The old men among us, like Donald here, who has always lived in the glen, are not ashamed to say that you cannot kill these beasts like others ; and no matter how true your aim and good your rifle, the bullet will just go clean through them, and never a bit the worse will they be. Hech ! but it is just awful to think upon, shooting at “ Auld Cloodie ” himself—at least so Donald here says ! But as I was just saying, each forest has its own peculiar muckle hart, and it is not ourselves of Glen Brayne that would be out of the fashion whatever. So five years ago, or it may be six, we started a grand muckle hart of our own. Donald, you’ll mind how we saw him first that misty day in October month, when we and Mr. Tomline (that’s the laird’s son) were out after the deer, and how we came right on him down the Lone Glen, away to the west there. He was within twenty yards of us, and the rifles in their cases, and the cartridges in my pocket !

‘ Well, he just looked fair at us, startled like, and

we could see the great stretch of his horns like the half of an English cartwheel. But all in a minute, just as I had got the rifle clear and was trying to ram in a cartridge, the mist came down upon us like a sheet, and when it lifted the big stag was nowhere to



‘Well, he just looked fair at us, startled like.’

be seen, though we tired our eyes out working the glasses. He must have gone before us like the wind, for he wasn't out of our sight more than a minute ; and the Lone Glen is a capital place to spy a deer in, if he be there at all.

‘Well, all the next two years he was up and down pretty constantly between us and our Strathaven neighbours. But whether it was the luck of it, as I say, and the way of the world—that ye cannot do the things that ye would—or whether indeed it was “Auld Clottie,” as Donald here would have it, we never had a crack at him at all, and the Strathaven laird but once. He’s a douce man, and uncommon clever with his rifle is Mr. Skene, but he had that very stag within a hundred yards of him that once, and he let him go. And I saw him at the kirk a week after that, and he says to me, “Charlie Ross, my man,” says he, “the de’il himself is in it, and no mistake at all,” which was not language for a Christian man to use beside the kirk, let alone that he was not given over much to profane swearing. But I’m thinking, sir, that the occasion was a great one, and would never be remembered sorely against him.’ [Here the speaker gave a very quizzical side-glance at the sportsmen.]

‘I fear, though, that I am wearying you, gentlemen, with the length of my story? You say no. Well, then, I’m coming to the gist of the whole matter, and that is how I had a chance at him myself year before last. I was gillying Sir Duncan, our laird, early on in the shooting season, and we had spied our way to the top of Craignahellach (“The

Maiden's Rock " you would call it in England)—it is the big hill above you there—without ever seeing the ghost of a deer.

' But it was just a grand day, with the soft west wind blowing, and Sir Duncan was not for turning home just then whatever. So we sat down under the rocks at the very top, had our lunch and lit our pipes, as might be now, and for more than an hour we talked over many a hard stalk.

' It was getting on for three o'clock when I took out the glass, careless like, and began spying away over to the Strathaven marches, and in one of the corries there I spotted the deer pony, and a man beside him, waiting quiet. I knew then that the party was out, and after deer too, likely, not having the pony up with them. So I kept squinting about with my glass, and after a bit I made out a herd of deer feeding in a small corrie about a mile from our march. There wasn't much, you will say, in that; but after a while a glint of sunlight came over the herd, and, by George! I saw my old friend again. Yes, it was just him, and his grand horns, fresh out of the velvet, shone as white as the ivory in the sun.

' " Sir Duncan," I cried out, "it's just the muckle hart, *our* muckle hart, they're after on Strathaven! Lord grant they may not get him!" For we are

very friendly, you see ; but we would not like to see our neighbours bowl over a stag like him, and one that we look upon as being our own.

‘I mind I could not take the glass off him, but they had their deer in a likely place, and I thought Mr. Skene would never be for letting him go scatheless again. I had not to wait long to see the upshot of it. I could not see the stalking party at all, for they had a wee bit knoll between me and them ; but all of a sudden I saw the deer jump up and run together down the slopes towards Glen Brayne—the river’s our march, you mind. They were all in a heap together, but the two white puffs of smoke followed in a moment, and I held my breath as I saw one deer roll out of the herd and stand quite still. But it was just a sinful shot into the brown of them, for I saw directly that the poor wounded beast was nothing worth, and had got that which was meant for his betters. Hech ! but Mr. Skene must have been in a grand rage at having his stalk mulled for him, for he was not the man, as a rule, to go “browning” the herd like that.

‘Well, the deer came down at a great pace to the River Brayne, and crossed it all together still ; but when the hinds went pounding up the hill on our side, I saw my big friend shake his great horns and twitch his ears about, as if he thought he wasn’t as young as

he used to be, and would not distress himself. So he just turned a bit aside from the hinds, and two grand stags with him, though for body and horn they were not to be named beside him.

‘These three they trotted a while longer, and then took to walking leisurely like, stopping a bit here and a bit there to take a bite of the grass, till the herd was two miles away and more. By that time I had shut up the glass, and was eager to be off, for the muckle hart was not an everyday visitor whatever. And maybe I was too keen and didn’t give them time enough to settle down a bit after all the fright they had had ; but anyway I made a terrible mess of it for Sir Duncan in the stalk.

‘It was a little glen they were in when we two started after them, not unlike where we are now. There was just the same sort of a burn, with birch- and rowan-trees beside it ; and altogether there was goodly shelter for our operations. But I wasn’t as cautious as I generally am (maybe that day was a warning unto me), and so when I had brought Sir Duncan right round below the deer, in at the bottom of the glen where they were, I didn’t go creeping, creeping up the little burn in the cover of the birch-trees, as I ought to have done, and never grudged the time so spent, but I brought the old man along at a fine pace in the open, on the far side of the deer

as I thought, meaning to keep the trees between us and them.

‘But the brutes! They had shifted a bit in the meanwhile; and just as I had intended to go down on my knees, and creep in upon them up the burn at the end, we came full upon them round a knoll on our side of the burn.

‘However, there was no help for it—the mischief was done. You may believe the three stags didn’t waste much time glowering at us, but turned and trotted away up the glen. Sir Duncan, as I told you, is an old man and not so good at the running as he was once, and he bawled out, “Take the rifle, man, and run for your life. Maybe you will cut them off at the turn.” For the glen has a sharp twist in it, and a deer, as often as not, never notices that, but keeps to the burn whether it runs straight or no.

‘I gripped the rifle with a sore heart, and ran for the knoll overlooking the burn at the corner, till I was fit to burst. It was all a chance, and I couldn’t tell a bit till I came in over the knoll where the deer might be; but this I did know—if the stag was still in the course of the burn, he would not be thirty yards from me.

‘Well, I staggered on over the knoll, and seeing nothing I just slipped quietly into the burn below; and as I did so my heart well-nigh went out of my

panting throat, for among those birch-trees I saw the great white antlers coming along—not yet level with where I lay, but I could see he would pass me by not twenty yards away.



'He passed away out of my sight among the birch- and rowan-trees.'

I cocked the rifle then and got it on to my shoulder. As I did, the muckle hart passed by, going canny, and half looking back. I can't believe

I had time to think, but as I pulled the trigger I seemed to be whispering, "Old friend, I have got you fairly this time!"

'The rifle missed fire! Losh! it drives me wild to think of—even to this day. And I never got the sights on that big stag again for the second barrel, for he passed away out of my sight among the birch-and rowan-trees. I sent the other bullet through the heart of one of the two that followed after, and when we weighed him he turned the scale at all but seventeen stone. But for all that he was just a baby to be compared to the other—just as Mr. Skene beside the kirk there could not hold a candle to me for hard swearing that day whatever.

'And so you see, gentlemen, our muckle hart is still to the fore, and maybe you will have some diversion with him, as I have had. But I have kept you over long with the talking, and it is time if it is your will that we were after the grouse again.'

With which final words the stalker, who had begun his tale in constrained fashion, continued it with increasing animation, and ended it with kindling voice and abstracted eye, as if actually seeing what he but described, jumped up from the heather, and resumed at once his ordinary somewhat reserved manner and his dog-whip.

AN ANGLER'S DREAM



'A great wave rises up on the stillness of the nearer water, and a fish full twenty pounds weight flings himself exultingly into the air at my very feet.' *Page 18.*

AN ANGLER'S DREAM.

I SUPPOSE it all came about from my having hunted up my reels, lines, and fly-books that afternoon. Tired with a long day's business in town, I had been refreshed by a delicious cup of tea at home, and then in my pet arm-chair I had essayed to set my multitudinous fishing-tackle in due array for the coming season. I generally have the luck, early in April, or even late in March, to get a few days on one of those pretty little Derbyshire rivers that run over the Churnet valley. The trout are not large and unsophisticated, but, on the contrary, small and unpleasantly wide-awake. Yet it is pretty fishing, and to get two dozen of these nimble quarter-of-a-pounders in a day is a feat by no means to be despised. So I always like to look up my fishing-gear betimes in February, even if visions of Scotland are still charmingly indistinct, and smack of a remote, perhaps impossible, future.

Somehow my flies were in glorious confusion—
'Jock Scots' hobnobbing with 'March Browns,' and

'Blue Doctors' with the most diminutive of black 'Midges;' and it seemed almost pleasanter to lean back in that comfortable armchair and think. My loving wife smiled as I did so, and seemed to be whispering, 'You know you are going off to sleep, and it really is shocking, before dinner.' But I paid little heed to her laughing remonstrance, and I only acknowledged it by sleepily and sententiously murmuring that I generally thought best with my eyes shut. Then, without more ado, I closed them. . . .

What a pleasure it is to be again on the Gauer's banks beyond Loch Rannoch!—and I am just coming to one of the best pools now. Also it looks in first-rate order, with that sweet curl on the water. But I think I had better have my lunch first beside it, and see what fish are moving. Now, these potted-grouse sandwiches are simply capital, and that man at Perth really does know the sort of whisky I require. I shall send for another dozen next week, before he gets sold out of this rare old brand. That wasn't at all a bad trout that struck there where the pool narrows at the tail: I'll have a throw over him in another five minutes.

But there! my comfortable reflections are cut short, as a great wave rises up on the stillness of the nearer water, and a fish full twenty pounds weight flings himself exultingly into the air at my very feet.

Good gracious ! Peter (to my attendant satellite, who is groom in London, but invaluable as gillie here), did you ever see the like of that ? A salmon as we sit here ! and yet the old men about here say no fish that ever swam could get over the Falls of Tummel and so into Loch Rannoch. Never mind, I was convinced they were all wrong, and this just proves it. We'll have a go for this fellow, Peter, at once. But what a pity it is that we have only got the little trout-rod !

Peter, grinning from ear to ear and with a look of mystified expectancy, comes down to the bank as I search out a 'Jock Scot,' and gazes silently down into the black depths at his feet, as if he expected the salmon to come straight up to the landing-net. I confess I have no such sanguine views, but 'nothing venture, nothing have,' say I ; and if he does come the river is not so wide up here near Loch Lydoch but that fifty yards of line and a fair-sized trout-rod can put him through his facings a little.

And here goes, as I take out several yards of line from the reel, and throw a preliminary cast into a side eddy to wet the fly. Another cast, and yet another : more line is out, and now the fly comes nicely round with the current, amid the bells and bubbles of the foam, over the very rock from under which the monster leapt forth to breathe the upper air. Bless

my soul alive! there is a great swirl in the water, a great boil on the surface, as the huge fish rises at once and takes the fly straight down with him. Up goes the rod point mechanically rather than with malice prepense, for I am much taken aback, and confess to a horrid trembling all over my manly form.

But there is no mistake about him: he is firmly hooked, and I hold my breath as he flies like an arrow out of the water, and then runs sullenly and strongly into mid-stream. I feel his great strength now, as the one-handed rod doubles under the strain; and the fifty yards of line are all but exhausted, when fortunately he changes his mind, turns and sails grandly, yet swiftly, downstream. In this procedure I can follow my leader, for the banks are flat at this point, and downstream I go double-quick time, putting on all the pressure that I dare. He never seems to wince under the application, except occasionally to jag the line about in an ugly way, like a terrier worrying a bone. But 'Jock' has evidently got a goodly grip this time, and the gut is as sound as it can be.

Bother it, though! those sunken rocks have an ugly look, as we come down past some treacherous rapids at the corner; and at one moment I think the line is severed, for it is deeply drowned, and the course of the fish brings it athwart a nasty sharp-nosed stone that just cuts the surface of the water. My

star is still in the ascendant. The fish flings himself again wildly into the air, and somehow the line is dragged over, not across, that razorlike projection.

‘But will he never tire?’ I mentally ask, after three quarters of an hour are past and gone, during the last ten minutes of which he has been nursing his strength by sailing slow and stately in a circle, still scorning the trout-rod’s puny strength and keeping well down in the depths. Is it a fancy, five minutes later, or do I really find him now and then beginning to answer the helm a little, ever and anon showing a disposition (be it ever so slight) to come towards the surface? It must be so, indeed, for when he changes his tactics next, and heads downstream again, his pace is not so furious, though, as it is over a rough bit of country for me this time, I am in sore straits to keep up at all, and once lose my footing, taking an ignominious header into a peat bog, though immediately hauled out by that active and invaluable Peter (good boy, that! he shall have half a sovereign if I ever land the fish).

Ten minutes more, fifteen, twenty—we have had an hour and a quarter of stiff fighting, but I gave it him badly in that last rapid; he tried to head upstream again, and I pulled him athwart the current two or three times, to his manifest discomfort. He is not so fresh as he was, though he avoids the bank

wonderfully ; but he is getting 'drowned,' and shows his snout above water now over and over again. I would give ten pounds for a gaff--for whoever heard of a Gauer salmon? A landing-net is an awkward weapon with which to attack a huge fish like that ; and he was so near me when he came round that last time that I verily believe a rapid sweep with the gaff at his tail might have done him. Well, never mind, Peter, you must do the best you can with him. Take care of your footing ! I wish we had got him beside a shelving bank. There now, there ! he's really coming in at last ; bring the net well under him from behind, and if you

Peter steps gaily but nervously forward, misses his footing as he trips on the polished surface of a very slippery rock, and plunges, with a wild yell of dismay, head foremost on to the great fish, which raises its snout from out the eddying foam-bells as if to greet him. There is a splash as if of a whale, another scream more smothered, a horrid flopping on the surface of the water, and then, crack ! the line comes back in my face ! and I and the monster are parted for ever. . . .

Just as I take off my coat and prepare to plunge in, doubtful whether it is to rescue Peter or to grapple with the exhausted salmon, but *partem in utramque paratus*, I feel my arm seized by a friendly grasp,

and a sweet voice murmurs in my ears, 'Wake up, sir, wake up; I shall never let you go to sleep before dinner again. The last ten minutes your contortions and grimaces have been frightful, and the way you



'There is a splash as if of a whale.'

worked your arms about most alarming. When you wound up by a terrible cry of "Oh, Peter, Peter! what *have* you done?" accompanied by a word so dreadful that *I* cannot repeat it, I thought it was high time for me to interfere, and so I woke you up.'

CRAIG-EN-GASH

CRAIG-EN-GASH.

THE time is 5.30 in the morning, the month is October, there has been the first fall of snow, which is lying thickly on the tops, and we are nearly 3,000 feet above the sea-level in a barren, wind-swept corrie. It is an inhospitable-looking spot at the best of times, surmounted by a frowning peak that rejoices in the awe-inspiring title of Craig-en-gash, and is clothed with confused heaps of granite and shingle rather than with luxuriant grass and heather.

The first cold red flush that heralds in a fine autumn day has not shot athwart the eastern sky, and all is yet dark save for the wondrous luminosity of the frosty air and the paling light of some few stars.

And still here am I and the hardworking stalker, MacIennan, crouching side by side in the darkness at the very top of Craig-en-gash, having spent the first few hours of the night in a shepherd's cottage at the Cabaan end of Muirton ground, and starting long before daybreak on a painful climb to the forest's

summit, on the very off chance that deer, which have been sadly scarce of late, will make their appearance by way of Strathconan march, and so across, all unsuspecting, on to our own ground, and into the very unpromising-looking corrie wherein we now lie.

Why deer, if they refuse to come on in ordinary times and seasons, should be confidently expected by the stalker to prowl about our forest like hyenas in the dead of night, and to browse around upon these scattered bits of shale and granite when there is good grazing on Strathconan, is beyond my poor philosophy. But we haven't had a shot at deer for well-nigh a fortnight, and the situation was considered to be desperate. So I have been despatched by my elders and betters on this forlorn hope ; like drowning men, they have caught at straws, but they have left poor me to hold on to them.

It needs not, however, that one should be a philosopher to know that blowing on one's fingers to subdue the bitter numbness that has crept upon them is a very poor substitute for hot coffee and a roaring fire indoors ; and I am just beginning to mutter '*Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat,*' when MacIennan, whose eagle eye, even in this semi-darkness, has glowered uneasily around, suddenly drops down by my side as if shot ! A hideous thought runs through me and chills my very marrow. This

terrible cold has evidently assailed the vitals of our energetic stalker. His days are ended, and I am alone—alone in the darkness upon the lonely summit of Craig-en-gash. Tears are just welling up to my eyes at this melancholy mental picture when a ghostly groan, hoarse and repressed, comes from the prostrate figure at my side.

‘Lord save us! mon,’ as if we were indeed, as I



MacIennan prepares to go into action.

thought, in great and sudden peril; ‘there’s deer before us noo. I have gotten a sight of two or three of them for all this confounded darkness. And they were heading right in upon us, too.’

Even while he is speaking, his quick and nervous fingers are lugging the rifle out of its case and clapping in a couple of cartridges. The next few moments of suspense come and go, keeping us with

our hearts in our mouths and my numb finger on the trigger. But no antlered head appears over our little knoll and stares at us in rapt surprise. Prompt action has to be taken, lest the deer pass away unnoticed, and we lose all chance of a shot by waiting too long behind our shelter. Again we creep to the top of the knoll and peer out into the frosty darkness.

‘Damn them, MacIennan! they have turned away somewhere.’

‘Steady, mon, steady; dinna show yoursel ower hastily. They cannot be far off whatever. When I saw them last, they werena a hundred yards away, and gaeing canny. It’ll no be long before we get a better view of the corrie.’

And as he speaks, ‘the faint East quickens, the wan West shivers’ (ahem! Swinburne), and a yellow streak shoots out clear across the frosty horizon; while the rosy flush of the coming dawn gathers strength in the heavens. There is some chance of seeing our quarry now. As we creep a yard or two onward from our heathery ambushade, and gain the top of our tiny ridge, we at once see the deer.

They have turned off, and are standing irresolute and suspicious, having possibly got wind of one of the Strathconan foresters, who comes out before day-break to keep his deer within their borders. But if

he is out on the hillside as well as we, he is too late this morning, and his advent or proximity serves but to turn the herd deeper on to Muirton ground.

We are barely 400 yards off the deer, but the ground that lies between us is only shale and shingle, windswept, flat, and impossible. 'We canna work them as they are,' groans MacIennan, with something of despair in his voice ; ' we must bide a wee, at any rate, and see what the brutes will take into their heads next. We're betwixt them and their own homes whatever (with a grim, noiseless chuckle), and it's Mr. Lennox is the lad for a run, if it comes to that.' So he is, perhaps ; but he well knows with what sinkings of heart those little ' runs ' across country are generally carried out.

Another period of waiting follows, full of suspense and expectation to us reclining on the oozing peat moss. We had come forward (thanks to my impatience) into a ticklish open position just as we became aware of the deer, and for a while advance or retreat, as they now stand suspiciously watchful, is impossible.

The full glow and glory of another morning comes across us as we lie there. But we are so utterly motionless, so entirely prostrate, that the keen eyes of those infernal hinds find no fresh object of alarm in the quickening daylight. ' MacIennan,' I whisper,

after a while, 'I'm dying of cold in the snow here, and can't lie any longer ; let's run in upon them.'

'Oh ! but you can, sir ; Lord love you ! I can see the deer grandly now, and there's a fine stag with them that I wadna let Strathconan welcome back again. You just hold on other ten minutes, and maybe they'll move on into a better place for us.'

We do 'hold on' another half-hour at least, and then Diana (who is presumably the goddess of stalking, *inter alia*) be praised ! they do condescend to move, every one of them—they number nearly forty—and troop onwards into a gully that will soon take them out of our sight, feeding peacefully as they go, though the stag, with that innate gallantry peculiar to his race, expedites the leisurely movements of one of his consorts who crosses his path by a playful, but effective, side thrust from his horn that makes the good lady hastily stop feeding and canter to a discreet distance from her aggressive lord.

As the hind quarters of the last and most dilatory hind disappear from our view, we assume an erect position with all the speed we may, and tear headlong for the ridge. We are not a minute after the last deer ; and now, as we look over, we have indeed improved our position. The rear guard is barely fifty yards away ; the big stag is lying down at one hundred and twenty. We can only see the tips of his horns,

but that much of him is well worth the inspection ; for the perfect cup of three points surmounts either antler, and whether his lower tines prove him a 'royal' or only a ten-pointer, he is a mighty beast. Soon the tips of his horns sink lower and out of sight. 'Losh me ! he's just lying flat on his side like a big dog,' grins the appreciative MacIennan, who thinks already that he has him in the larder. 'Eh ! but he's a bonnie stag.' And he adds, 'Dom those Strathconan men ! we have done them fairly this time.'

Our rapid strategic movement to the front has mended our benumbed circulation. So our next wait is not so painful, and by keeping my hands in my nether pockets I am fairly warm, when suddenly the stag rises into full view, crosses a small brow without giving me a chance that I care to take avail of, and then disappears lower down the gully. 'Lord grant that the hinds move on wi' him !'

This unfortunately they seem loth to do, and stand gazing in our direction as if something had startled them. They certainly have not seen us hitherto : probably some side shift of wind has betrayed our proximity, for the morning air has been dangerously still and fickle, and one or two cross currents have struck my cheek.

One wretched hind trots a few paces up the hill-

side above us, beginning to think now that yonder knoll has two very dubious, unnatural projections upon it. She looks down full upon us, flicking her ears about uneasily, and though we begin by resuming our former motionless tactics, there is no doubt that we are discovered, and, worst luck of all, the stag has started first. MacIennan, without rising, now slips the rifle clean out of its case, saying, as he quietly thrusts the latter into one of his capacious inner pockets, 'That damned bitch of a hind will give the alarm noo. I ken weel the road that they will take back on to Strathconan. And you may just be up and awa', Mr. Lennox ; there's nothing else for it but running like mad.'

Even as he whispers, the harsh bark of the innocent and maligned hind, who is now quite sure that things are not as they should be, grates through the still and frosty air, and the forty deer wait for no further signal, but run together, streaming down the track of the burn in one brown mass, as they make straight for Strathconan.

They are not much quicker at the start than we are, but, encumbered by rifle and telescopes, we lose at every stride, while they take heather and burn, rocks and peat, with that long, swinging trot, which seems so gentle, but is so effective in getting them at a great pace over very rough country. Faint but

pursuing, breathless yet wildly excited, with horrid sinkings of heart at the prize so nearly won now eluding us, we still flounder onwards, now going head over heels into a soft peat 'hag,' now slipping dangerously on the surface of a smooth and shaky stone.

Trying to overhaul a stag who is in fine training, and has two hundred yards' start conceded to him, is but poor fun, and the starter from scratch has a very



'The figure of a man comes suddenly into view against the sky.'

faint chance of ever getting on terms with his field. But just as we feel that further pursuit is utter folly, the stag, who is taking a strong lead of his hinds, being now well-nigh upon the Strathconan march, the figure of a man comes suddenly into view against the sky, on the shoulder of Craig-en-gash, and exactly in front of the heavy stag's line.

The forty deer stop as if shot, and stand at gaze.

Ah ! my artless and unsuspecting Strathconan gillie, what would your masters say could they only see you now and the work that you have done this fine October morning? Little did you suspect the Muirton stalker of this early work. You thought you were alone upon the mountain side.

The full yellow flush of the autumn sun throws the powerful Highlander into strong relief on the skyline before he takes in the situation with his roving eyes, and throws himself headlong into the heather. But the lord of the herd and every single hind besides have seen this unlooked-for apparition standing in their path, and we gain fifty yards in upon them while they are still motionless, as if turned to stone. But now, led on by a big red hind who has all along disapproved of the course that the stag has taken, they jump off again at right angles, and gallop madly along broadside to us.

‘Losh me !’ roars the panting MacIennan, ‘we’ve got the chance after a’. Dinna pull the trigger noo till yon fine beast is fairly opposite to ye, and then loose it intil him.’

The rifle is brought hastily to the front, and blown and breathless as I am, I still seem to have some of my wits about me. The words of the best deer-stalker that I know flit across my brain : ‘Never mind how done up you feel. When you take your shot, set your

teeth and get in your breath for a steady aim. You must be bad indeed if you cannot keep steady for ten seconds.' I never was in greater need of such advice, for I am breathless to the last degree, and cannot, for lack of time, take to that great restorer, my whisky flask. However, there is no help for it. Nerving myself for the shot, I settle my elbows into the tufts of heather in front of me, till the rifle lies in my grip well-nigh as



A shot at the running deer.

firmly as on Wimbledon Common, albeit 'wobbling' slightly with my sobbing breath. I take the level on one of the leading hinds, and am ready when the big stag trots briskly past, barely two hundred yards away. He is a fast-moving mark, but I have bowled a stag over at the distance before, and can trust my rifle's accuracy at any rate. I draw in a long, long breath, sight him beautifully, with the sun at my back,

as he comes along the top of the nearest ridge, and pull the trigger. Before ever the smoke blows across my sight, I see the big stag sway uneasily, then stop all of a sudden, and fall out of our sight. He is not a hundred yards away from Strathconan, and I and MacIennan tear over the intervening distance, lest he yet have strength to gain sanctuary. But as I come in over the ridge, with my rifle raised for the *coup de grâce*, I find the grand stag lying dead in the purple heather at my feet.

No feelings of inward compassion for the bonnie beast lying low can stop the tremendous exultation of the next few moments. Drawing his knife, MacIennan relieves his pent-up emotion by a series of ear-piercing war-whoops and a grotesquely improvised Highland fling. His yells must chill the very blood of our disconsolate ally from Strathconan, whom we are just in time to see making rapid tracks downhill for home, evidently too disgusted at his innocent share in the good work to come and join our libations over the mighty dead. Poor fellow! Unless we and the Strathconan party exchange confidences at the next Inverness 'gathering,' there is little will be known of the results from his morning's walk.

'Hech! but, Mr. Lennox,' says MacIennan when he has cooled down a little and is now turning his knife to more practical purposes than when he used it

as an accessory to his war-dance, ' that poor fule thinks the company on Craig-en-gash is too good for the likes of him this morning. And he'll be none too eager to give the news in Strathconan, for this stag is one that the stalkers have been bragging about all the year.



MacIennan relieves his pent-up emotion.

'A STAG OF TEN'

'A STAG OF TEN.'

THE eleventh of August last year was a bright, breezy day in Glen Brayne, with a light wind from the west. Mr. Cresswell had told the stalker the night before that he would be glad of a walk over the hills, just sufficient to get into good trim for the Twelfth. And Ross, in response, being all impatience to begin the season, had suggested that the Cresswells, father and son, might not only take a walk, but the rifles, on to the forest ground, just to see what there might be in the nearer corries. This idea was well received, and carried with acclamation.

Ross was up spying at daybreak, and with satisfactory results. He left the glass with Peter, the gillie, to keep a watch upon the further movements of the herd, and came down to the lodge to get the rifles and hurry up the sportsmen by bringing news of the deer in a favourable corrie. To his impatience, however, they seemed to occupy an unconscionable time over their breakfast. But Mr. Cresswell at all times liked doing a thing leisurely ; and furthermore, being

a novice at deer-stalking, he felt all that pleasing trepidation and reluctance to begin the sport that we may imagine to have animated the soul of the good Mr. Winkle when he found the skates upon his feet and every shadow of a chance of retreat slipping away from him.

However, everything comes to him who can wait, and Charlie Ross was not without the philosophic stolidity peculiar to the Scotch character ; and at last Mr. Cresswell sauntered into the gun-room, with a good deal more interest in the next movements than was apparent from his stately demeanour.

'Now, my man, we'll make a start,' said he, and his stalker had whipped up the two heavy express rifles in their cases from off the deal table, and disappeared round a corner of the passage to lead the way, before the words were well out of his mouth. So fast round the corner did Charlie go that he nearly knocked down the fair daughter of the house, who was coming noiselessly in his direction. He just managed to avoid such a rough catastrophe, and after apologising with true Highland politeness, cap in hand, he added : 'If my lady cares to see anything of the stalking to-day, we can give her a lift up the hill on the deer-saddle, and it will be ill-luck whatever if she doesn't see deer at any rate.'

The girl's face grew bright with pleasure, and she

soon wheedled permission from her father to accompany them, promising on her part to be very good, and keep in the background, when it came to 'the creeping and crawling' part of the programme. So Ross gave her his hand to mount her on the pony, and skilfully arranged a tartan shawl from pommel to



A lift on the deer-saddle.

stirrup by way of riding-habit. The *cortège* then advanced, in open order, stalker first. Three miles of gentle climbing on that fresh and lovely morning were soon compassed, and, when they reached Peter at his post of vantage for spying, they found the deer had not moved very far since the keeper had seen them

last. The herd had crossed the river into Glen Brayne, and had then gone up the face of the hill above ; the stags were now lying down, and the hinds mostly feeding.

Ross, with his keen, practised eyes, soon made out the red-brown forms against the lighter grass ; but it needed liberal use of the telescope, at which the Cresswell party were not adepts, to enable the others to make out anything at all, and even then it struck the stalker that it was with the eye of faith rather than with that of sight. Miss Cresswell, however, after judicious fixing of the telescope upon some tufts of grass, and after much pretty inability to apply it successfully to her right eye with her left-hand fingers, did for one moment—as the telescope swayed backwards and forwards like the pendulum of an eight-day clock—catch a glimpse of something that she was sure was 'a stag,' or at any rate a deer of some persuasion. After that her enthusiasm passed all bounds. 'But how,' she asked, in tender, feminine fashion, a few moments later—'how can you be so cruel as to kill such a beautiful creature?' Ross smiled grimly at this question, and said it was only his business to do what the gentry might wish—a Jesuitical reply, that certainly threw the onus of the blood-guiltiness upon them.

However, now was not the time for moralising.

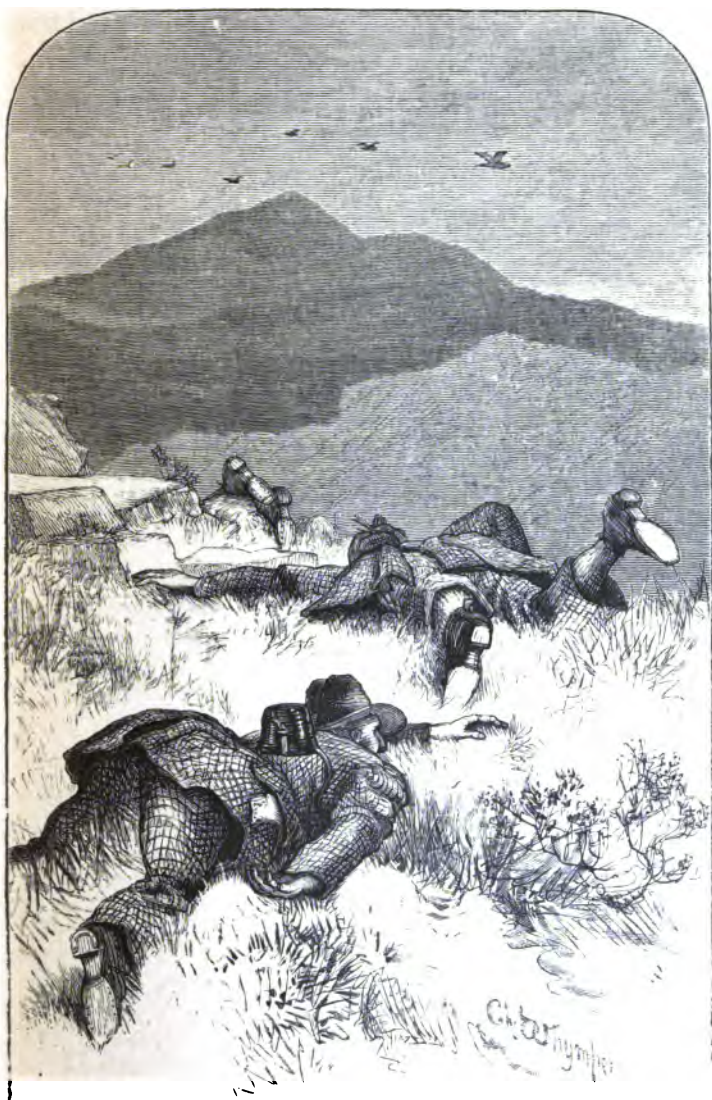
There the deer were, somewhat below them, and nearly two miles off to the westward. At the moment they were lying quiet, but Ross did not think it likely that they would do so for more than another hour at the most, and he was anxious to be moving forward again.

Peter was now told off to bring the lady along on the pony down to the river, and to work his way up along its course, making use of a sheltering ridge, till he could place his fair charge within reasonable eye-distance of the deer—if he saw his way to doing this without prejudice to the stalk. 'But, by George! Peter,' cried the now thoroughly excited forester, 'if you make any mistake and put away the deer, I'll murder you in cold blood, and I'm sure my lady would not be behind in wishing to do the same!'

However, in the event, the gillie played his part with great circumspection. And, after these kindly words of caution, the parties diverged, the two sportsmen and their chaperon making at first straight for the deer, the wind being right. The stalker soon saw that if he was upon the deer before they moved from the position where they now lay, the first stalk of the season would be a complete success, so far as *his* department of it went; for the ground that lay between them and their deer was of the most favourable description for a near approach, being at the

outset very rough and broken, while he remembered a burn course that would help them at the end. So, keeping the knolls well between him and the herd, he brought the sportsmen along at a good pace, till he was within a quarter of a mile of the quarry; and when the sheltering knolls served him no longer, he lay down to give the others breathing space, and to reconnoitre the last few hundred yards of the ground.

The bright midday sun was now pouring down on the knoll, round which the unconscious deer lay. So far all was well: though one or two of the hinds were up and feeding again, the main body of the herd were still stretched out in various attitudes of repose. The big stag of the herd—a nice and shapely, though by no means gigantic, ten-pointer, already clean of velvet—was lying in the middle of his comrades, with his great yellow body glistening in the sun, and giving, ever and anon, a lazy flick with his ears as the flies troubled him. Altogether the glass gave a pretty picture; but I fear there was a murderous interest in the eyes, that now fairly blazed as they looked through it. For the real excitement of the stalk was about to commence. So far all had been plain sailing, and the heathery knoll where they now lay had been gained by no great display of forest craft. But the last quarter of a mile would put the stalker on his mettle. And as he



‘And forth the three crept beyond the knoll.’ *Page 51.*

glanced over his shoulder at his two companions, now quivering all over with nervousness or 'deer fever,' he could not help fearing that, even were the next few hundred yards safely got over, there would be bad work with the rifles. However, that was not his affair, but theirs. So now, slipping the rifles forward in their cases till the hammers were free, tightening the telescope strap, and instinctively giving a professional glance all round, back as well as forward, with uplifted finger he motioned the tiros onward; and forth the three crept beyond the knoll.

One circumstance was in Ross's favour--the Cresswells crept, crawled, and squirmed in, over, and among heather and burn and peat, with utter disregard alike of their clothing and their comfort, while in complete accord with the eccentric movements now being executed by their leader. In this branch of the art no pupils ever showed themselves more docile. And if imitation is the sincerest flattery, Charlie Ross could not have had two more devoted worshippers, who copied, or I might rather say parodied, each duck of the head and sinuous twist of the body with conscientious, if awkward, fidelity to their more lithe and active original.

Keeping well down in the heather, and pausing to watch the herd after every move forward, the

stalker now got his party safely over the first fifty yards, during which they were more or less exposed to view, without in any way exciting the keen-sighted suspiciousness of the ever vigilant hinds. He then rolled all anyhow into a burn, fortunately not in full spate on this occasion, which led, though by devious courses, in the direction of the deer, while its tiny banks afforded some shelter for the sportsman's progress. All sound of falling stones and pebbles, disturbed as they scrambled uneasily onwards, was drowned amid the merry splash of babbling waters ; and after the exercise of great patience and caution, where the banks were all too low for concealment, Ross, in another quarter of an hour, was peeping cautiously over the heather tussocks at a point in the burn barely ninety yards from the leader of the herd ; and having satisfied himself that all was right, he beckoned up the others to either hand of him, where the rifles, now denuded of their casings, lay.

'Now, sir,' to Mr. Cresswell, in a voice rendered hoarse by excitement and necessary repression, 'that's the big one, him that lies nearest to yon grey stone. He's lying yet, but I'm thinking he'll not do that long. I've just seen him shift himself a bit, and indeed it's about time that he was up and feeding again. Just take the rifle, but don't pull trigger on him till he's standing and fair broadside. There's

no fear of his starting off whatever. We've done the brutes this time. Steady, steady ; don't show yourself over the bank '—a caution that was not needless, for the elder gentleman, in his eager but awkward endeavours to get hastily into a good position for a shot, was craning for an instant well over the heather. Young Cresswell was next made comfortable—if a man could fairly be so called who was lying on his stomach, as well as on some sharp little rocks, and was more or less wet all over his body. But the heroic calm of his features betrayed none of his actual discomfort.

And now that everything was nicely adjusted, it was the stag's turn to make the next move. This, however, he seemed in no hurry at all to do, but lay for some ten minutes longer contentedly chewing and flicking his ears : ten minutes during which Mr. Cresswell and his son indulged in all the delightful ecstasies of mingled hope and fear (the latter largely predominating).

But he is up now—and all in a moment, too—before one would think so large an animal could fairly gain its feet. His head, as he licks his flank, is turned away from the burn, but his body is three-quarters broadside—and no fairer shot, whether for distance or position, was ever offered to mortal man.

There is a long solemn pause while the sportsman

squints down the rifle sights, a stillness during which the babble of the tiny waters grows painfully audible, till it is broken a moment later by the loud roar of the Henry 'express.' Before the smoke closes in on their view they can see the fragments of peat and heather fly into the air a foot over the ten-pointer's back ; and, as the smoke blows to one side, the big brute appears galloping madly, but in full possession of all his powers, up the slope. 'Give it him again, quick, with the left-hand barrel!' Ross hisses out, 'and aim a good foot lower. That last shot was just miles too high.' And Cresswell does 'give it him again ;' but, though this time they do not see where the bullet strikes, it has not landed, if appearances may be trusted at all, in the moving mark. The younger gentleman, too, opens fire. But it is now worse than useless : the stag is up with his herd, and, a minute or two later, their serried ranks come into view, clear and dark against the sky, on the top of the hill, only to sink gradually out of sight as they dip below the skyline on the other side. And here Mr. Cresswell, though a God-fearing man, gives vent to his overwrought feelings in the heartfelt exclamation, 'Oh, d—n those deer !'

As Ross shuts up his glass with peculiar solemnity, and then takes a professional squint down one of the still smoking rifles, he is thinking, maybe, of what

would have happened had that ill-used but accurate weapon been in his own tried hands. Yet small sign of his inward emotion escapes him. All he says as he slowly draws the case again over the hammers, and swings the rifle on to his shoulder, preparatory to a homeward start, is, 'Aweel, you need not expect to get into the way of it all at once. The great thing, you'll mind, is to keep cool and aim low. Nine-tenths of the deer that go away clean missed have had the bullet sent just an inch above their backs.'

THAT BIG TROUT

THAT BIG TROUT.

A SENTIMENTAL STORY.

WE knew him very well. Year after year, as winter gave place to kindly spring, he used to come back to his old haunt under the culvert that ran over the Middleton brook, beside the mill plantation. And there, on a fine warm evening, we could generally see him if we peeped cautiously over, lazily sucking in what flies the eddies carried right into his mouth ; for he would barely stir a yard to gobble up the finest 'green drake' that ever threw life away by dallying with the treacherously smiling water's edge. No, he was not a greedy fish, but took what good things Fortune sent him, without troubling himself about the flotsam and jetsam that passed him by on the right hand and on the left. But probably his lazy, easy temperament kept him in high condition, for he was a lusty trout, with a girth and sides that would have done credit to our London aldermen. To see him was to admire and long after him. For, as near as we could guess from so long an acquaintance with his lordship of the brook, he would be three and a half

pounds' weight, or even a little over. And how we did long to have him on dry land, that the accuracy of good British standard weights might decide to a nicety whether our judgment was discriminating or at fault! But the difficulty was to inveigle the monster. And that perhaps lent him his greatest charm. He was so far from curious, so little inclined to be hasty in his action, that minnow and worm and fly, if hooks were part of their appendage, could never extract from him the faintest semblance of 'a glorious nibble.' No matter, either, whether the water was thick and brown with a thunder shower, or clear with summer drought, he let our lures alone. As a family friend, we all used to drop him a line in turn, while our opinions differed as to the best method for enticing him into a correspondence. My father, whose views were, and I am thankful to say still are, of the severely honest order, would never attempt anything but the straightforward, if artificial fly, and the times that he has wriggled at full length up the bank, cowering behind some opportune tussocks of reeds and grass, only to be disappointed of a rise, would make all sympathetic and right-feeling angels weep.

One frequent visitor of ours, a Mr. Clifford, was desperately enamoured of this retiring trout, and there were no stratagems that he held too base to employ for his capture. He generally waited till the

brook was in flood, and then dropped in large lobworms at the top end of the culvert, letting the stream carry them nicely in the direction of the monster's jaws. Live minnows, too, with a hook very delicately inserted ('You shall handle him as though you loved him') under the skin so as to leave them full scope for their most natural gambols in the water, were despatched in the same direction; but never a bite came but once. That once I shall never forget. I was sitting on the bridge, when all of a moment I saw my friend's eyes go round as saucers, and his fingers tighten convulsively upon the rod. 'I have him now,' he hissed between his teeth, as the line came taut and the rod bent double. For one instant there was a determined resistance, the next an audacious quarter-of-a-pounder was flying wildly through the air at the rate of forty miles an hour, over the head of the disgusted Mr. Clifford. He never heard the last of that; but it did not make him desist from his efforts at luring the coy beauty. Why the big trout was never caught napping when the water was coloured we could not make out. I had a theory (it may be romantic, but I gave that fish credit for all human sagacity) that when he saw one of these tempting lobworms or lively minnows bearing down upon him, he used to sail up stream till he got above the bait, and then drop down sideways in the

current a few inches above it, to see if his portly form encountered the unseen resistance of a casting line.

To come to my own pet way of angling for him : I had a great idea of 'dibbing' or 'daping' with the natural fly, bluebottle, grasshopper, or what not, impaled upon a tiny hook. As my feeling was that this suspicious customer was always looking out for casting lines, my notion was, Don't let him have any of those troublesome things in the water to bother him and get in his way. 'Dibbing' is the very thing for him : you keep a big bumble-bee flopping up and down on the top of the water, and if you only make it look lifelike enough, you'll get him one of these days. But the day was long in coming. I shall never forget peeping cautiously through the reeds and seeing the sardonic look upon his lordship's face as I kept agitating the rod point and keeping a large mayfly dancing wildly about two feet from his stately nose. He never showed the slightest desire to possess himself of the dainty, and only acknowledged the delicate attention at last by sheering a foot further off. This want of confidence hurt me very much.

The keeper's idea was that a fish like that was better out of the brook than in—'always a-eating of the small fry,' as he elegantly condescended to explain. So Velveteens was allowed to have a grand field-day, when he summoned two or three other choice

spirits, and, after mature deliberation, they agreed to block up both ends of the culvert with nets and then frighten him into one of them. So the geniuses set to work with their apparatus, and refreshment in the shape of a large stone jar of heady ale. And first they blocked up one end, watching to see he didn't bolt, and then they closed up the other. Now they were sure they had got him, and they sent word up to the house for the gentlemen to come and see the big trout caught. But we didn't quite like the idea of a game fish being done to death in that fashion, so none of us went down—fortunately, as it happened, for in the event there was very little to see. When they had got their nets down, one intrepid spirit volunteered to go in under the culvert with a stick, to 'prod' him out. In he went, and splashed under the culvert, in a very cramped and uncomfortable position, I should rather fancy ; but after 'prodding' away for a quarter of an hour without bolting the big fish, he came out again looking rather in want of fresh air, and said two or three big 'snags' had drifted in with the stream under the culvert, and the trout must be trotting up and down under these, for he never could even feel him with all his 'prodding.'

After exhausting all his available supplies of bad beer and worse language, Velveteens disbanded his talented coterie, and sent up to the house to know if

he might shoot him next time he might 'appen upon 'im houtside the culvert.' But this roused the finer feelings of our very imperfect nature, for so far we had been consenting unto his untimely end by nets and 'prodding.' But now we felt that his escape was providential, and we unanimously declared that so fine a fish should never come to his end save by fair and lawful methods.

Alas for such a goodly resolution ! Only the very next week we had two troublesome schoolboy cousins to stay with us, and we were sorely put to it to provide them with entertainment. Fortunately they were, considering their age and inexperience, determined anglers ; and as the contemplative sport took up much of their time and very little of ours, we always encouraged their disposition towards it to the fullest extent. We even went so far as to tell them all about our pet trout, laughing in our sleeve the while to think what a pretty dance he would lead them if they once fairly became engrossed in endeavours for his capture. We really turned an apoplectic purple with inward laughter when giving them full instructions how to approach the culvert without being observed by the ever-watchful fish. But we laughed too soon.

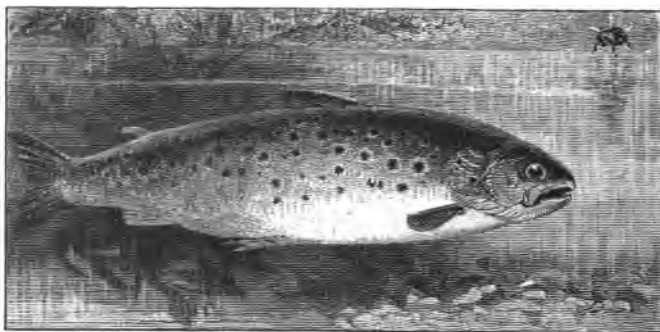
It was only one short hour afterwards that two members of our party, as they were leisurely pacing up and down the terrace walk, heard howls of delight

proceeding from the vicinity of the Mill plantation culvert, howls so inexpressibly dreadful, that their first thought was that one of these unruly schoolboys was murdering the other, and that this devoted other was strenuously resisting his own untimely demise. Full of this idea, they fled wildly in the direction of the culvert, and were rewarded on arrival at the brook by seeing these two pleasant boys squatting like Red Indians upon their hams, yelling with an irrepressible emotion, and in the midst of them, flopping vainly on the grass, was a 4 lbs. trout!

The rest of this sad story is soon told. Our instructions how to approach unseen had been all too perfect. With an ingenuity that was positively, fiendish, they had first made a cross-line out of a ball of string we had unwittingly lent them to fly their kites with, and had attached to the middle of this line a yard of strong salmon gut, and to that, again, three powerful hooks tied back to back as in pike-fishing with livebait. This done, like some crafty Ojibbeway upon the war-path, one wily schoolboy had squirmed along, *ventre à terre*, and across the culvert till he was safe on the further bank, and exactly opposite the unconscious fish, taking one end of the cross-line with him. With Machiavellian cunning had they then approached the water down either bank, till they could both just get a peep of the monster through

the rushes, and could drop the hooks softly down into the water not far from his noble tail. He had no suspicion of his danger, but lay, they said, without ever moving, till they worked the hooks stealthily along, using fair 'give and take' with the cross-line, right under his belly fins; and then — *horresco referens*!—they regularly '*snatched*' him. One good upward jerk from two powerful schoolboy arms, acting in harmonious accord, fixed the hooks firmly into the under part of his body, and then his 'play' (or so they called it, for what was death to him was sport to his inhuman assailants) was brief but tremendous.

Alas for that trout! he was goodly and pleasant in his life, yet the Philistines got him instead of some more high-minded and right-thinking sportsman.



'You keep a big bumble-bee flopping up and down on the top of the water, and if you only make it look lifelike enough, you'll get him one of these days.' *Page 62.*

NORTHWARDS AGAIN

NORTHWARDS AGAIN.

IT is August once more, and on one of the first evenings of the month we are off from Euston by the 8 P.M. Scotch Express. Now that we look back, how fast the nine months have fled since we returned so sadly from hillside and heather ! Yet a few months ago, in the early spring, it seemed as if our emancipation from the toils and pleasures of the great city would never come again. If ever indistinct visions of salmon and deer did flit before our eyes, they seemed to be elements of an impossible and foolish dream. But the seasons have passed by so noiselessly, yet so speedily, that we have never noted their flight, and are now caught wondering how the time has gone. And here we are (like Æneas, *jam certus eundi*) in one of the London and North-Western Railway Company's most comfortable of carriages. Porters have fled hither and thither, faint but pursuing, with piles of luggage which looked as if by no possibility would time or space permit of their going in the vans attached to our train. But the bustle is

over now. The hands of the big clock are upon the hour. Mind has conquered matter ; order has supervened to chaos. The ticket inspectors stand clear. The guards make for their particular door-handles ; and, as the whistle screams responsive to the waving green flag, the Limited Mail, with a dozen extra coaches to-day, glides smoothly down the platform out of the big and gloomy station, *en route* for what we think the fairest country upon earth.

No messenger hurrying with a telegram can stop us now ; this is no false start ; we can feel the train gather speed as she goes till she fairly flies down the line. Farewell, then, for three months to the worries and discomforts that assail the London householder, though our pet Oxonian of the party is looking rather solemn as he nestles back in the carriage cushions, and is thinking, maybe, that our flitting northwards, pleasant as it undoubtedly is, means farewell, in his case, for three months to a pair of blue eyes that have looked somewhat lovingly into his own at recent dances.

But we all welcome the very thought of Highland pursuits, even if bright eyes do not look on to crown our efforts. We are tired of living in a crowd, and solitude's charms appear great by contrast. ' Remote unfriended ' we mean to be, but not ' melancholy slow ' in consequence. Sportsmen are generally

spoken of as hail-fellow-well-met sort of people, but they do not, even if this accurately describes their characteristic, pretend to leave every atom of selfishness to their fellow-creatures. The very idea of day after day in solitude, with only Sandy MacGillup to be our henchman, brings balm to our soul. And if we happen to know of some particular loch among the hills, hidden from the eyes of the unknowing passer-by, where a basket of fifteen pounds' weight of good trout is a moral certainty, we shall not, therefore, advertise the fact in the *Field*, let us say, or the *Whitehall Review*. No ; as long as we can we shall keep it for ourselves, and hug ourselves, moreover, in the joy of superior knowledge.

But we have wandered off the line of our journey, which is long and not over-comfortable. Yet we have the sweet consciousness that each hour is bringing us nearer to our beloved glen ; and in twelve hours we are at Perth, where we get refreshed by a most excellent breakfast in the station, and go rejoicing onwards for the little that now remains of our railway journey. Scotland was looking her loveliest as we passed the wayside stations on the Highland Line, through the fair cultivated glades and sudden crags of Dunkeld, along by the wild yet wooded slopes of Killiecrankie, and ever northwards, till the view grows more open and the hills are one glowing

mass of purple heather. Perthshire is the noblest of the counties, and holds within her ample marches most varied scenery, from the smiling cornfields and fat lowlands of Strathmore to the desolate grandeur and savage arid mountains that close in above the lone moor of Rannoch. Very stern can that latter country look when she puts on her sombrest hues, and is seen through a mist darkly amid the driving rain. But on the day that we formed one of her countless summer visitors Scotland was attired in her most becoming dress—a grand contrast of sunshine and shadow that spoke of rain—changeeful as a coquettish damsel in her moods, yet pleasing alike in all. To our eyes the old earth never looks so lovely when bathed in one continuous flood of light as when cloud and sunlight dispute supremacy, and the distant hills stand out, bright purple one moment, fading away the next dark and dim, even to nothingness. Change in nature has its echo in our hearts ; and the one golden glory of some eastern sunset is monotonous and tame compared with the close of a stormy northern day, when the wild masses of clouds have ranged themselves in deep-set banks against the westering sun, and have taken from him their changeful colourings of crimson, and gold, and black.

We felt the beauty of the day, and our spirits had recovered from the night journey by the time that

Pitlochry was reached. We now quite looked forward to the long drive as a pleasant addition, though—like most of us, I fancy—when the train drew up at the station we were unaccountably loth to get out of it. The longer one has been travelling, the more desolate is the feeling on stepping out on to the platform; and the mind conjures up, as one nears the journey's end, all sorts of possible and impossible chances that may befall the wanderer at the station. Perhaps the coach isn't there, having met with an accident; or perhaps there never has been a coach in these regions, and we are indebted for the belief in its existence to our own too vivid imagination or to the innocent vagaries of 'Bradshaw' and the 'Sportsman's Guide.' Perhaps all the seats are engaged a month beforehand by this large assortment of aggressive tourists, who at once assail the station-master in a loud voice, confident in their mastery of the situation. 'Now, my man, I am Mr. Simpson and party' (how this can be, the speaker does not condescend to explain), 'and our seats by the coach have been booked for a week in advance. So just get our luggage on to it at once.' But in the Highlands these self-asserting individuals are rather apt to have their belief in themselves somewhat rudely shaken by the measured rejoinder: 'Aweel, if your seats are a' taken ye'll be right eneugh. And ye may

just bide your time whatever, for mebbe the coach wull no be for starting this fufy minutes. I'm thinking the Mail frae the North isna due this half-hour or mair.'

In this particular case, thinking possession was nine points of the law, we left our luggage and scrambled at once on to the box-seat of the coach, leaving a tight fit for the driver, who was, however, an old friend of ours, and grinned approvingly from a distance. We then lighted our cigars and surveyed the usual 'Mr. Simpson and party' haranguing a helpless porter with much complacency. A shy young man in spectacles followed our good example by scrambling into the second seat, which is further occupied by two hard-headed-looking Scots, who kept silence even from good words, and showed, by the perfect imperturbability of their demeanour, that to them, at any rate, time was of no consequence whatever.

So that by the time the good Mr. Simpson and his party had done fussing over their manifold belongings and came round the corner, they saw (or their horrified imagination did) the coach already alive with human beings, and that Heaven helps them who help themselves—a fact which was strongly corroborated by the laconic guard, who, in reply to anxious inquiries, said he had nothing whatever to do

with seats being booked, and did not know, either, who had ; furthermore (though more self-evidently), that the coach just carries as many as there is room for, and—this in a stolidly indifferent tone—‘ mebbe they’ll just have to wait in Pitlochry till next day



‘ I am Mr. Simpson and party.’

whatever ;’ a remark which drove Mr. Simpson to frenzy and his party to mute despair.

However, these little things ‘ arrange themselves,’ as the French would say. Mr. S. found room outside, as did also his eldest pride and joy—a youth of unpleasantly obtrusive and freckled disposition—o’er

whose fair head some fourteen summers must have shed their smiles, the result being a growth of most terribly carroty hair. Mrs. Simpson and juvenile daughters got inside, and were speedily frightened out of their ordinary British serenity by the fearful bangs and thumps on the roof overhead while the process of loading up with luggage was being consummated. But '*tout vient à qui sait attendre*'—even the start of a Highland coach; and at last, when the North mail had come and gone, the ponderous vehicle forged slowly ahead through the village, attended by none of the vivacious and friendly interest that bids God-speed to a foreign diligence.

Our course lay eastward, for the Highland lodge we were making for lies among the highest spurs of the Grampian range. The road grows rough and hilly soon after Pitlochry is left behind, and the unwieldy coach blundered along at very sober speed over the bumpy track. But we went along not unpleasantly through scenery growing ever wilder yet, and with loftier hill-tops looming in front, up the mountain passes till the hill-road reached its highest point, and right beneath us the country opened out again into the lonely splendour of our own beloved glen. Far away down at the foot of the valley a silvery streak showed where the little river rushed and roared down the precipitous gorges torn out by its

own mad course. In the middle of the valley a few patches of cultivation and three or four white cottages, surrounding one somewhat more pretentious lodge, revealed to our glad eyes the whereabouts of our home for the next three months. Behind the house the rocks, scored with the grip of the Great Ice Age, and thrown by the convulsions of long ago into strange but picturesque confusion, rose one above the other, crag above crag, and knoll beyond knoll, till they joined their loftier brethren at the head of the forest ground, while far away the towering form of Ben y Gloe himself, with one fleecy cloud resting athwart his bosom, was 'dimly to be descried.' The last three or four miles of the drive, being straight downhill, were speedily compassed, and in another twenty minutes the coach drew up at the lodge gate, and left us with all our baggage to the loud-voiced welcome of the attached and ever courteous Sandy MacGillup and other satellites.

BEFORE THE DAWN

BEFORE THE DAWN.

IT was on no forest ground that the gory deed of killing my first stag was done. No phlegmatic stalker long accustomed to fifty stags a season led me with scientific accuracy and bewildering coolness to within a hundred yards of that shabby and unconscious six-pointer, and then placed a terribly accurate 'Express' rifle into my grasp, saying, 'Tak' him noo that he is broadside ; ye canna miss him whativer.' No, indeed ! No such matter-of-fact surroundings deprived my first stag of nearly all romance. It was not only my own nervousness that lent a lurid halo to that day's proceedings—there was a smack of piracy about the deed as well, for the stag that so rudely met his fate at my unaccustomed hands had strayed on to sheep ground from the forest. We had advertised that year for a grouse moor, and a grouse moor pure and simple we had got. We may have paid dearly for it, or we may have got it cheap ; but the fact remains that till October only a few hares had fallen to break the monotony of grouse—*toujours* grouse. We knew,

incidentally, that the higher ground 'marched' for a few hundred yards with a neighbouring forest; but the information had gone in at one ear and out at the other, for we knew nothing of deer save in the abstract, having never seen one. And a 'royal' stag might be fashioned like a hippopotamus, for what we knew or cared.

Enlightenment was, however, to come. I had made friends with the two shepherds, father and son, of the upper ground during the two months we had already passed in the glen, and meeting them one Sunday evening, early in October, I stopped to speak. The elder man, after alluding to the increased difficulty of approaching the much-harried grouse, remarked, 'The deer are beginning to break out of the forest now. This morning, early before the dawn, I saw three of them against the skyline, above my shieling. I could have got in upon them from the Short Brae, for they were not far to the side of yon deep burn. And surely you will not go south whatever without trying for a deer. You can come to us and welcome for the night, and it is myself and Hamish here would be glad to go out with you early to see what we shall see. It's but a chance, but at this time of the year it *is* a chance, you mind.'

The matter dropped for the day, as I was indifferent through ignorance, and the shepherds doubtless saw

the want of interest in my face. But my mind recurred to the subject a day or two later, when I had been out all over the ground, and killed one and a half brace of the toughest old cocks with which ever mortal tried conclusions. There was no doubt the grouse-shooting campaign was played out. Would it not be as well to give the new sensation a trial? And after a good deal of indecision I sent word up to the shepherds that evening that I would be up with them next morning well before daybreak.

And then unusual preparations had to be made for the morrow. We could not boast of a rifle in our establishment; but the keeper finally produced from the gun-room some ill-looking slugs about five to the ounce—the subtle and persuasive powers of which I was then ignorant of; but I am now firmly convinced that the keeper himself was not quite innocent of cutting off hinds at Christmas with these baby bullets—and a rusty old muzzleloader that hung over the gun-room mantelpiece. Be that as it may, we drew the shot from half a dozen of my gun cartridges, replaced it in each cartridge with seven or eight of these kindly slugs, and consolidated the new charge with some drippings from a wax candle. This done, I went to bed with an easy conscience at 9 P.M.

Imagine me, then, at 3.45 the next morning wending my solitary way uphill to the shepherd's

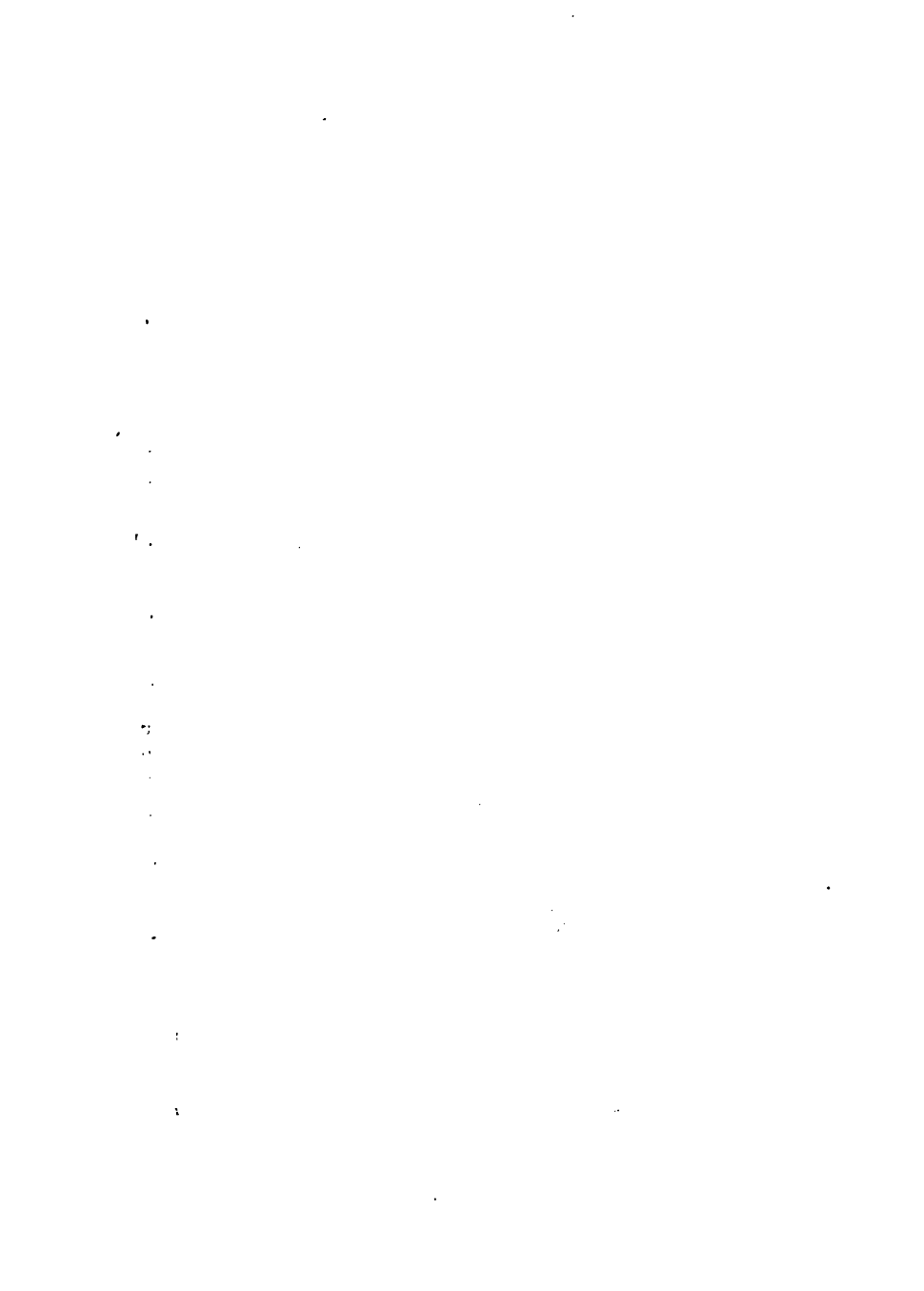
cottage. All was still perfectly dark, the air was chill with the night dews, but though there was no glimmer yet of the coming dawn I could tell instinctively that when it came it would herald a fine day, for there was a suspicion of keenness in the air, and the dew felt as if congealing to hoar-frost on the ground. I had two miles and a half to go across the moor before the cottage was reached, and by the time I was knocking at the doorway the first faint glimmer of morning appeared in the east, scarcely stronger than the glow, sometimes rather felt than seen, of the 'Northern Lights.'

The shepherds did not keep me waiting except to load up my weapon with the suspicious slugs: their early habits brought them out into the clear frosty darkness in far better trim than I was. For already the forty minutes' exercise at such an unusual hour was making me drowsy and lethargic when I stood still. But their cheery anxiety to be off, and to give me a chance at the biggest game upon the hills, soon rekindled my own waning enthusiasm; and, as we started uphill again, I no longer considered myself an unmitigated ass.

An hour's further climbing at a brisk pace, considering the sharpness of the ascent, put us on the top of a hill that gave good views over the nearer forest ground. And now the faint glimmer in the east gave



'The cock grouse came out and strutted on a neighbouring hillock.' Page 87.



place to a rosy flush that filled the whole countryside with the joy of morning. The light was still indistinct, and so far we had not needed to be wary in our movements ; but each minute now brought a fuller and a warmer glow. The cock grouse came out and strutted on a neighbouring hillock, clapping his wings and crowing till it sounded as if he had a dozen comrades at least. Far up the heights came the plaintive bleat of a stray sheep upon the forest, answered in turn by his home-loving friends in the lower glen. The hum of one or two insects, even thus late in the year, broke the intense stillness of the air.

And in that great quiet of the early dawn, as each hilltop stood out momentarily in a stronger glow, I felt that, even if no deer were seen, I had done wisely in coming out to see the sun rise over the everlasting hills. It was one of those mornings that a man never forgets, that crop up again in his dreams, and come across him, full of tender memories, when he is waking.

But the pleasant reverie into which I then had fallen was suddenly dispelled by the elder shepherd seizing his son's arm with a hasty movement, and hoarsely whispering, 'Look at them yonder, Hamish—five, six, seven of them—crossing the burn there into the Short Brae. It's not for nothing that we brought the gentleman out to-day.' The younger

man turned eagerly in the direction indicated, and evidently one glance for him was enough. But though I strained my eyes, want of practice in discovering deer proved a complete barrier to my catching a single glimpse of our quarry. We had no telescope, and the shepherds had trusted entirely to their own eagle sight and knowledge of every feature of their familiar corries to detect the deer. This confidence in themselves was not misplaced, and I doubt now whether any telescope could have improved much upon the father's glinting pair of eyes. Born and bred in the glen, he knew each stick and stone and tuft of heather in every corrie.

Again he whispered, after no needless delay for exultation, 'We'll be after them now before the light gets stronger. I'm thinking there is a bit staggie among them, but the rest are just hinds and calves. But a stag, sir, is a stag upon the sheep ground here ; and as it's your first chance, you'll have no need to be too particular. I was na' expecting to show you a royal all at once.'

Hamish whipped up the gun, just opening it to see if the cartridges were all right, and away we went after the welcome herd. They were not over a mile off, but it was broad daylight and past seven o'clock when we too crossed the burn, and came on behind the knoll overlooking the Short Brae. This was a

small slope covered with fine benty grass, much liked, I subsequently heard, by the deer.

When we looked down over the summit of the knoll on to the slope, the deer had got a good deal farther than the shepherds either liked or had anticipated, full three hundred yards away from our ambush, and still feeding on. There was a muttered consultation as to the relative merits of two rival schemes. The younger man, impetuous as youth is wont to be, and ill brooking a delay, was for backing at once out of our present commanding position above the slope, and coming round again lower down, so as either to meet the deer or take them in flank. But the senior shepherd, so far as I understood his rapid utterances, was alike afraid of the wind and of showing ourselves by such a movement. We were in a good position as we were ; the deer must come back to the forest as the day went on, and he knew their habits accurately enough to know pretty well which way they would take upon their return. If, however, Hamish liked, he was welcome to make a good *détour*, leaving us two lying there, and then show himself far down in the valley to the deer, who knew him and the time of his every morning appearance too well to be startled, but would just trot gently back on to the forest, probably the same way they had come. And anyhow, being above them, we should have time to

run a hundred yards or so either way, if they showed an inclination to alter their course.

After some demur from Hamish, who thought, as the juniors of this generation mostly do think, that it is the pleasing duty of youth to instruct age, this plan was adopted, and Hamish carefully crept backwards till he was well out of sight, when, waving his hand encouragingly to us, he commenced an extremely rapid descent towards the shieling again. Quickly as he tore down the hillside, the time seemed long to me waiting there. For now I was in full view of deer for the first time, and greatly excited thereat. The 'deer fever' (a very real complaint, as those who have suffered from it know) was upon me.

I could make out, or fancied I could (which did just as well), the 'bit staggie' of which they had spoken when the herd first attracted their eagle eyes. Personally, near as we were, I could not yet be sure of horns, but there was a certain stateliness of demeanour manifested by one animal that convinced me he was master of the herd, and knew it too. Twenty minutes later I was still staring my eyes out to detect antlers, when I saw the deer start, run together, and then stand gazing down into the valley below for a few moments. 'That's Hamish noo,' murmured the shepherd, but I was too agitated to understand him.

For now, led on by a ragged, ugly-looking hind, the seven deer commenced to file back at a leisurely trot straight in our direction towards the forest. They were a quarter of a mile away when Hamish moved them; but this trot, quiet as it appeared, was taking them over the ground at a great rate, and in a very few seconds they were within range of a good 'Express' rifle. 'Hold on, man, hold on,' as I could not help raising the gun; 'ye canna think to send slugs into them at two hundred yards. Keep down, or they'll see you.' And on they come showing large and brown now—for the sun was rising just opposite, and throwing their forms into strong relief against the grass. A hundred yards away—eighty—sixty—does any sudden instinct warn the leading hind that the real danger lies ahead, and not behind? Anyhow, she stops suddenly, turns half round, and stands with her keen face looking straight up at our hidden ambuscade; then she sniffs the air suspiciously, and seems to think it over. These movements are fatal to her lord and master, who has hitherto followed her unhesitatingly, well covered by her form. But now he runs on a few paces after she has stopped, and comes level to her side; he is not fifty yards away, and I *can* see horns now. I take a quick, hurried, nervous aim; but a gun, in the hands of a tiro, adapts itself more readily to the eye and aim than a sighted

rifle, and, as the heavy charge rings out on the stillness of the peaceful morning, the shepherd, nearly as excited as myself, ejaculates, 'Losh me! he's got it somewhere into him. Loose at him again,' which in my excitement I should well-nigh have forgotten to do. Eight or nine slugs more fly whistling through the frosty air from the second barrel, but the poor wounded beast goes out of sight as I pull trigger, and we do not see the effect of this second shot. 'Here, I'll take the gun,' cries the shepherd, as he jumps to his feet, thirty years older than me in actual age, but well able to give me points so far as youthful activity is concerned; and we fly over the heather after the vanished deer, he gaining at every stride, though he carries the gun and is forcing more slugs down the open breech.

As we round the corner where the stag went out of sight, I am indistinctly conscious of a vision of flying hinds and calves some half a mile away; but my eyes are immediately riveted on one brown form standing motionless in the foreground, with head carried low, as if in sore strait. So the slugs have done their work; and a thrill of exulting excitement runs through me as I hurry on after the shepherd, who knows well enough by the appearance of the deer that concealment is unnecessary, and the stag as good as already in the larder.

A kindly shot through the neck puts the dying stag 'where the wicked cease from troubling.' But my wilder feelings of joy are chastened by the grandeur of the beast that I have slain. Never again on the hillside shall that noble stag lord it among his hinds, and, though I survey his shapely form with pride as he lies low before me, yet my heart feels very piteous at the sight of his glazing eyes.

Very little, however, do sentimental reflections trouble those worthy shepherds. The third single shot acquaints Hamish of a *coup de grâce* being necessary, for no unwounded deer would have waited for that last cartridge which sounded the *mort* some five minutes after the double-barrel; and his wild whoops of triumph re-echo up and down the valley, causing the sheep to fly panic-stricken and huddled together. The elder shepherd attends to the funeral rites with great enthusiasm, and in turning the stag over we find what an excellent pattern those slugs have made. One obtrusive pellet has gone through the lungs, two through the ribs, and another has smashed the hind leg high up, practically hamstringing the deer. No wonder he did not go far with his herd.

It is nearly fifteen years now since I killed my first stag, but his head still looks down upon me reproachfully as I write, from above my study door. I have killed many deer since then, and most of them

with far better heads; but that morning's sport remains freshest in my memory of them all; and though the face that looks down upon me from the wall is but that of a shabby six-pointer, yet to him I owe my first introduction to the forest craft; and for this cause I return his somewhat fixed and glassy regard with most affectionate glances.

THE LONE GLEN

THE LONE GLEN.

FAR up among the distant mountains, 'across their uttermost purple rim,' and under the deep shadows thrown by the highest peak of all the forest ground, there is hid a sharp and precipitous ravine or corrie, called by the Highlanders, from its rare desolateness and lack of life, the 'Lone Glen.'

The circling sweep of gloomy crags that close in upon the near horizon seem to cut off all suggestion of an outer world. In it are recesses so black and deep that under the full glow of the August sun there still lie scattered patches of the winter snows. The ruddy glare at midday, the cool white snow-wreaths, and the black cavernous stretches of that far-off corrie, form a picture full of the finest contrasts for the few that pass that way.

But in the hot autumn of 1876 our own object in so often seeking the wild remoteness of that hidden glen was rather the chance of sport than the love of scenery. In the sultry weather that then held Scotland for three weeks under its scorching breath it was

the only corrie within our forest marches where deer would lie. During that intense heat the stags lay motionless, except at nightfall, in one unmolested herd upon the highest peaks of Lochnagar. In the Royal forest the now lamented John Brown apparently was not upon the stalk, nor did any German 'Serenity' appear to mar the peace of the deer.

Day after day, faint but pursuing, we toiled to the head of our ground, to look if haply one stag at least had not wandered back to the home of his fathers, to his own familiar feeding-ground. But day after day the telescope would give no glimpse of deer, save perhaps a few hinds with their calves, lying in the black shadows thrown by the scarped rocks of that wild glen. But let the glass only be turned on to the tops of Lochnagar, and we could see great stags by the hundred lying still and quiet on those heights where yet cool breezes fanned the flies away. On our own ground for nearly a month we never saw a stag of the most innocently juvenile and shabbily antlered description.

But a day came at last, as days do come to any man who will wait, which seemed likely to make us forget those tantalising visions on the neighbouring forest. The morning broke no cooler than before, and under the fierce heat at mid-day the myriad voices of nature seemed to quail and grow dumb. It

was a day when the leap of a trout in the burn beside the path, or the weird cry of the uneasy curlew overhead, made the traveller start, for all around was so intensely still. Yet Duncan, the worthy stalker, would have no man despair, and day after day persisted that the Lone Glen would harbour heavy deer once more. If it was unkindly suggested to him that each succeeding day proved him a poorer prophet than the one that had gone before, he would screw up his weather-beaten features into an expression of preternatural sanctimoniousness, and reply, 'Aweel, it's the way of this world that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But I'm thinking the deer's there any way, and how shall we get what few chances there are if we will not work for them?'

It was well-nigh two o'clock before we had spied our way to the topmost crags of Craignahellach (*Anglicè*, the Maiden's Rock), the big hill that overlooked the Lone Glen. But the distance was eleven miles, and the weather was not such as to make us inclined to emulate Weston on the road. But at last we were on the very top, and flung ourselves with a sigh of relief upon the unfriendly masses of shale and shingle that lay on the rugged mountain's side. Far below us stretched the corrie we had come so far to seek, but even Duncan rubbed his face meditatively with a red and yellow cotton handkerchief before he

surveyed the prospect with his glass. It needed no glass, however, to show us a small herd lying just above the snow, but one look through the telescope proclaimed them hinds and calves. Nothing else was to be discovered by the most liberal use of the glasses, and we soon turned to the lunch in our pockets with a poor appetite and a determination never to follow Duncan's lead again.

Half an hour later we had lighted our pipes, and were leisurely glassing the hinds, chiefly from a natural history or zoological point of view, to watch their innocent or frolicsome movements while all unsuspecting of danger, when I saw what seemed to be a white stick of burnt or withered heather beside them violently agitated, as though by a passing gust of wind.

'What's up now?' I cried. 'Is there a breeze springing up on this sweltering day in the corrie yonder such as would blow the heather about like that?' Duncan looked up at my exclamation, and his fine keen eyes grew round and large as he stretched his hand out to his glass and cried out after one moment's inspection, 'That's not heather at all. That's a stag. Just see him now as he rises.' And by the time I had the glass once more applied to my eye a 'royal' stag was in the view, coming out of a small gully which had hitherto concealed all but the

tips of his horns from sight as he lay. What I had mistaken for burnt heather was the points of his antlers fresh from the velvet, and shining like ivory in the sun. He had one of the most symmetrical and widest heads that it has ever been my lot to see, and such a prize would make up for long disappointment.

Duncan, though he admitted that the stag was in a rare good place for a stalk, was not going to allow himself to be betrayed into any outward display of emotion, and, now that matters unexpectedly stood upon so good a footing, was inclined to throw cold water upon the generous ardour of others. 'Aweel, the stag's there to-day. But we haven't got him yet, and it's awful likely a grouse maybe, or the De'il himself, will start the deer before we can open fire upon him.'

Melancholy as these forebodings might sound, he lost no time in proceeding to action, for he swung the rifles on to his shoulder, and started on the stalk at once. We made a good *détour* to have the wind in the most favourable quarter for our approach, but it was all downhill work, and when first seen the stag was barely a mile and a half away. So we were soon surveying the monarch of the glen from a mighty convenient knoll that lay 300 yards from him. His grand yellow body glistened in the sun, and the great

stretch of horn shone white. A lazier, a more complacent, and a happier beast I never hope to see. He lay right over on his side in some wet black peat, which on so hot a day he evidently found most grateful to his portly frame. All sentinel work he left to the hinds about him, and he never once turned his head while the murderous ambuscade were quietly watching only just out of shooting distance. The hinds were but few in number, and were so near to their lord and master that they formed no impassable or even dangerous outpicket upon our road : if we were once within range of them, we could 'open fire' (as Duncan always phrases it) upon the stag as well.

As we slipped cautiously down from the rocks above him, slowly, lest some awkward movement should betray us to the ever-watchful hinds, we came below the line of a small ridge that hid us for the moment from the deer. Once on the top of that ridge 'and again in sight of the herd, we should be not one hundred yards away from the stag. Duncan, in the dip of the hollow, gave a most meaning look over his shoulder, and touched the handle of the hunting-knife that lay in his waistband with a horrid significance.

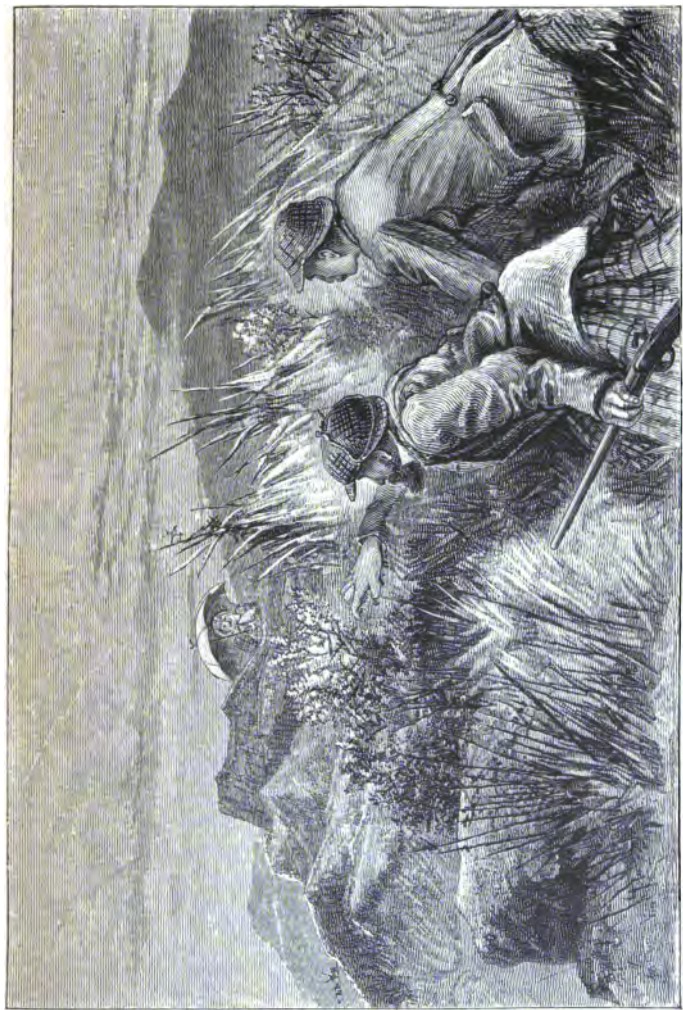
'Poor beastie !' he muttered, yet with a chastened resignation in his tone, 'there's no chance for him

now whatever. But he'll look grand strung up in the larder at the Lodge'—a poor consolation for his manes, should they be passing that way, to view his ignominious suspension from the beams. Perhaps no few seconds ever seemed longer than those in which we were laboriously squirming and wriggling upwards to the top of this last intervening ridge, with our hearts in our mouths, and our forefingers playing with the trigger-guards, prepared to shoot at once, should the too hasty projection of a stalking-cap put the deer away. But the top was gained at last, and there, inch by inch, amid the waving grasses, and the tufts of heather, our heads rose synchronous, till we could command a full view of the fateful gully just below. . . .

There was not a single deer to be seen anywhere!
One hasty glance all around to assure poor Duncan that his senses in general, and more particularly his eyesight, had not all deserted him, and then there rose up upon the sultry air a howl of irrepressible anguish, the long-corked-up effervescence of three weeks of silent disappointment. The next few hurried words he said, though uttered indeed in the Gaelic tongue, could readily be explained to a mind of the meanest capacity. But as some great sayings will not admit of translation, being either too idiomatic or too delicate to bear the rude process of

transplanting, so we consider it hardly desirable to reproduce the full force of the language that now burst from that disgusted Highlander's lips.

But what could have startled the deer? Even as his utterance rose strident on the nearer air, on the far horizon across the corrie there loomed large and clear an apparition which for one moment I privately took to be 'Old Bogie' himself, responsive to Duncan's blasphemous calls, but a moment later it resolved itself before our awe-struck gaze into the unexpected framework of a large white parasol, underneath which there rose up, slowly and by jerks, a stout old lady wiping the perspiration from her dewy brow. Another figure, and yet another, till I should judge there were nearly twelve upon that barren skyline. The party, on sighting us, came hurriedly forward with profuse manifestations of delight, and of having something of the utmost importance to communicate. As Duncan proceeded to shut up his now useless glass, an operation which he performed with unusual care and deliberation, taking it joint by joint as though it were some fragile instrument that rude handling would inevitably destroy, a smile of malicious amusement came over a face that was otherwise full of the most unmitigated disgust, as he groaned out, 'The Lord save us! did ye ever see the like o' that on the forest? It's just Piccadilly the day. Braemar Gathering is nothing to be compared with this.'



‘ . . . the unexpected framework of a large white parasol, underneath which there rose up, slowly and by jerks, a stout old lady wiping the perspiration from her dewy brow.’ *Page 104.*

Onward came the unwelcome band of tourists in happy unconsciousness. ['Ah, Diamond! Diamond! thou little knowest the mischief thou hast done.'] The stout lady, though manifestly sore let and hindered by the roughness of the intervening country, maintained her pride of place, and was the first to bear down upon our expectant group. 'Dear me!' she cried, when at last within hail, 'this is indeed interesting. To think of our having the luck to fall in with a real hunting party. It only wanted so novel an experience to make our day's outing complete. And we have news for you that I am sure will gladden your sporting souls. We have just seen a tremendous stag (at least I am sure it must have been a stag, it was so large, you know). It was tearing down the hill as fast as it could go. I don't know what could possibly have alarmed it. But I have no doubt, if you hurry on, that you will catch it soon.'

So far this pleasant female, and then fortunately gasped for breath. An equally stout and elderly gentleman in spectacles, with no collar and a wide-awake hat, who was evidently all impatience to take up the tale, next opened fire upon our defenceless position. The utterances of the party were all so rapid and voluble that I could only occasionally edge in sideways a murmur of assent or disagreement,

while Duncan never once looked up from the heather, but gently rocked himself to and fro in an agony of subdued despair.

‘Allow me,’ said that middle-aged and collarless tourist, commencing his innings with gusto, while his wife fanned her brows with a handkerchief and shifted the angle of her parasol—‘allow me—Mrs. Octavius Brown, my wife’ (and then plunging headlong *in medias res*). ‘I am so glad to have met a kindred spirit in these seemingly untenanted wilds. It does, indeed, give a finishing touch to my satisfaction to find an intelligent stranger to whom I can communicate the tidings of my remarkable botanical discovery upon these mountains. Our guide-book did, indeed, tell us that on one or two of these hills it is possible to find that plant, elsewhere unknown in the British Islands. I allude to the Alpine Gentian, or, as I would prefer to phrase it, accepting the nomenclature of my great predecessor Linnæus, the *Gentiana nivalis*. I confess that I was, alas! somewhat dubious of the aforesaid guide-book’s veracity; but *here* (producing a very humble and dejected-looking flower, and beaming all over with a tell-tale joy) is the object of our search. Pray examine it carefully. For my own part I have not the slightest hesitation in pronouncing it the genuine article.’

This was too much for Duncan; it was the last

straw. When he thought of the stag that he had lost by the innocent appearance of these self-satisfied tourists in the Lone Glen, and then saw a decrepit-looking 'specimen' held up for inspection, as equally deserving of enthusiasm and congratulation, he could no longer restrain his rage. He jumped up all of a sudden from the heather, seized me by the shoulder as I was advancing to take the plant from the hand of the excited botanist, and began hauling me *sans façon* down the hill towards home: 'Come awa', mon. Dinna ye stand here glowering at that misguidit auld fool (he used a far worse word) wi' his bundle of withering weeds, but just come hame wi' me. The stalking's played out, if we're to have the likes of them trapesing all over the ground without ever saying by your leave or with your leave, and as bold as them that has paid a long price for their divair-sion.' And he actually did succeed in cutting that remarkable interview on the skyline short by withdrawing me thus abruptly from the midst. To this day we can well imagine the open-mouthed amazement of the innocent intruders, as the sportsmen rapidly receded from their view homewards, instead of carrying out Mrs. Octavius Brown's suggestion and overtaking the frightened stag by mere swiftness of foot.

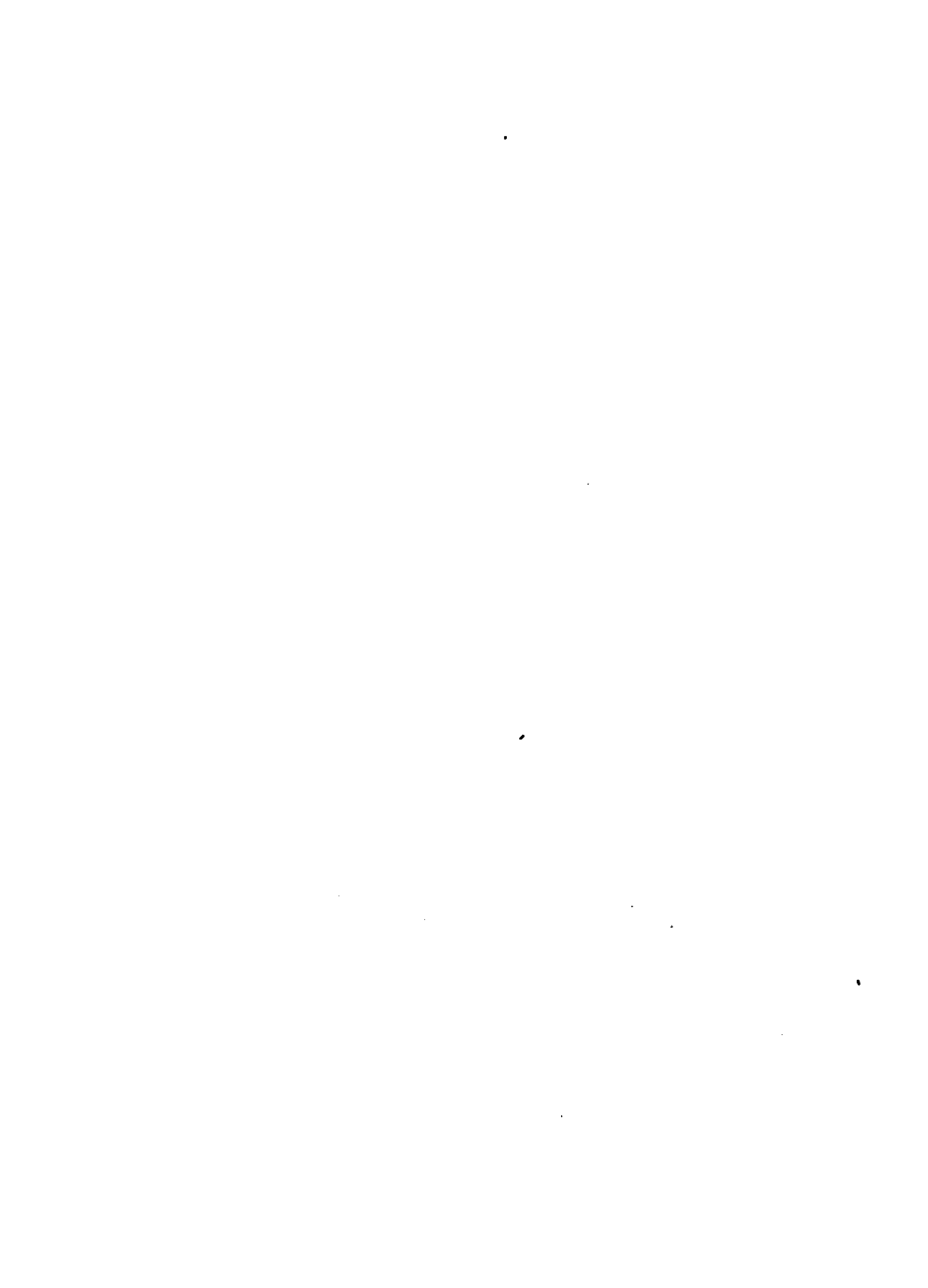
Other stags have wandered since within our

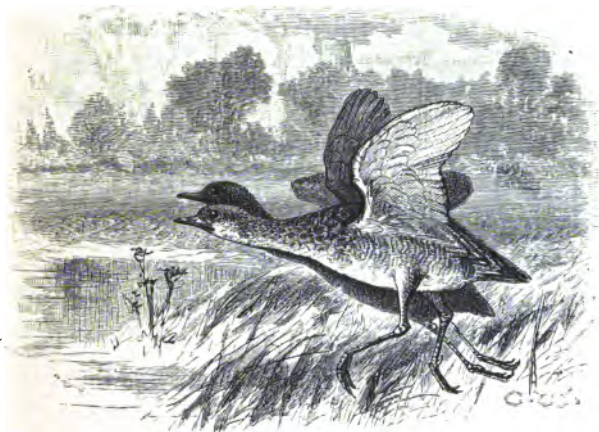
marches, but we have never seen that royal hart again. Deer are but timorous creatures at best, and it is readily conceivable that the vision of that white parasol upon the neighbouring skyline gave the poor beast's nerves a shock from which he never rallied.



Duncan's anguish.

SPRINGTIME BY THE RIVER





A couple of startled landrails.

SPRINGTIME BY THE RIVER.

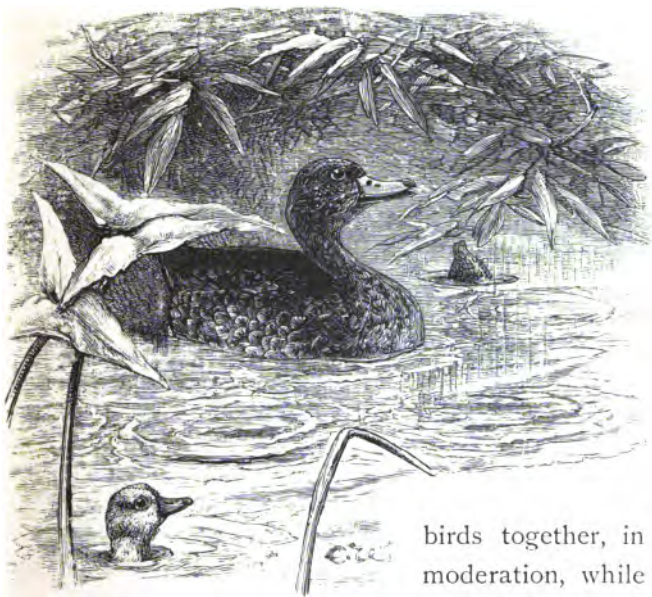
WHEN the first faint shimmer of silvery green comes athwart the larches, green that is kindled when the sunlight plays upon it into the tenderest colour upon earth, nothing can be pleasanter than to wander down to the river-side. What if it be early yet to make a full basket, and only half a dozen of the speckled trout are taken from the stream in a day? Still, to nature's true lovers, tender memories are awakened by the springtime of the year. The birds are fluttering and toying in every tree, as we wend our way down towards the river. The warmth of the sun to-day

has called into life the first detachment of shortlived insects that play above the treacherously smiling water's edge—woe betide them if they venture too near to that rippling and inviting surface!

Though every bud is still closed, the germs of life are there, soon to follow the example of the early larches and disclose their stores of tender green. As we climb over the last hedge into the pasture that skirts the river, we drop right upon a couple of startled landrails that take to hurried flight, birds that rarely allow themselves to be seen at this season. And, sheltered by the alder bushes, we come so suddenly upon the nearest bend in the river, that a wild duck, careful as she generally is, has no time to conceal her fluffy brood, but, after one or two quacks that betoken the liveliest dismay, rises from off the pool and disappears above the nearest wood; while, as if the flap of the maternal wing were a concerted signal, a dozen tiny balls of down make twelve neat round swirls in the water, and disappear as if by magic, only to reappear under the opposite bank, where the black flashing eyes of each tiny mite steadily regard us, as they bob up and down on the dancing eddies of the pool.

Swift shadows, thrown from overhead, pass and repass us, as the wood-pigeons ceaselessly fly to and fro about the wooded uplands, and their soft and

soothing note blends in our ears with the melodious babbling of the rapid river. Restless and greedy birds they are, we fear, more beautiful than virtuous, and do more harm to the farmers than all the game-



The uneasy mother.

birds together, in moderation, while it requires great patience and know-

ledge of their whereabouts to make any appreciable difference in their ever-increasing numbers. As we listen, the pleasant dull sound of afar-off double-barrel is swept by the breeze across our ears from the direction of the Fir Plantation, which looks as if

'velveteens' had something to say to these rapacious marauders amid the spring-sown wheat.

It is so warm now at midday that we put up our rod, though we had thought when we brought it with us that we were little likely to use it. Yet there is a balmy mellow feeling in the air that tempts us to essay the gentle craft once more, and after twenty minutes, during which we do not even see a fish stir in the water, we at last succeed in coaxing the first trout of the season out of his cozy retreat in a small back-eddy right under an overhanging alder bush ; and as we get the net under his brave but exhausted form we rather flatter ourselves that we threw that fly very neatly into a side current which took it well in under the alder, when throwing straight at the place would only have landed our casting-line into twigs and disaster.

Our captive is a fair size for our small Derbyshire stream, all but half a pound we should say (laugh not, ye Thames trout anglers—size is but relative), and we go on well content, getting one rather smaller, if anything, in a nice gravelly run, and pricking a third that rose somewhat shyly, but seemed to be rather a nice fish.

The 'March Brown' and a claret-bodied fly yclept 'Old Joan,' that seems peculiar to these regions, are the only lures to-day—the latter for choice. A soft

fleecy cloud comes across the westering sun as we work down to our favourite pool below the mill, and here we are rewarded for our patience during a fruitless hour by landing three sprightly victims in quick succession, two in mid-stream, and the last under yon overhanging 'scaur' upon the farther side. He rose short the first time, but as the flies dropped lightly over him again, he jumped clean out of the water in his eagerness to make sure of the dainty, and the fly is far down in his throat when the landing-net claims him for its own.

But a more chilly blast now strikes across our cheek, warning us that it is but early May, and not midsummer; and with these five fish we have to be content, for not another can we rise. And as it is cold work wading at this time of the year, we soon desist, and join our contemplative friend on the bank above, who has seemed deeply interested all the afternoon in our angling, but now says he had quite forgotten all about our paltry existence in the pleasure of studying nature by the riverside, and must have kept pace with our movements quite mechanically. He says he is now going to publish a poem about this very afternoon, and is not at all daunted when we suggest that it will be rather lacking in incident. 'Incident!' said he. 'What do we contemplative men want with incident? A poem that is to express,

in some poor fashion, the yearnings of my soul after Nature will not deal with such tangible things as incidents. And yet,' continued he, lovingly, and with an abstracted air, as if of retrospection, 'did you ever see anything prettier than the wild duck with her brood at the first bend of the river, or than that large flock of wood-pigeons sweeping round the graceful larches? I must introduce them somehow in my poem. To me such things are incident enough.'



A loving couple.

THE CHILDREN OF THE MIST

THE CHILDREN OF THE MIST.

MIST is a much worse enemy to the deerstalker on the East Coast, in the neighbourhood of Lochnagar, Glen Muick, and Caenlochan, than towards the Atlantic seaboard. Granted that for a month without ceasing the rain may pour down among the Western hills, yet the weather, though undeniably dark and depressing, is as often as not quite clear. But on the high fastnesses of Clova and Lochnagar the mist will lie for ten days or even a fortnight without ever lifting, chill, clammy, and productive of despair. The higher tops are wrapped in one sullen and impenetrable gloom, but it is not till the sportsman, undaunted alike by experience and by the voice of reason, has gone up the hillface into the regions of seafog and mist, that he can realise once more how hopelessly dense the atmosphere has become.

I have a pleasing recollection of one October day in Glen Cally, how we were completely deceived by the comparative lightness of the lower slopes on the forest. We had a visitor with us, a novice at the

forest craft, and as eager for blood as a half-starved ferret. Well, of course we wanted to show him the fun, if there was any to be had ; so we drove off in the trap to Charlie's shieling, about four miles up the glen, in the face of one of the most unpromising mornings that it has ever been my lot to be out in. A still small rain was falling, so small as to be all but invisible ; but, close and continuous, it soon found its way down our collars and trickled ere long over our manly bosoms. But, though we certainly could not see one vestige of the more commanding hills on either hand as we drove along, yet we flattered ourselves that the mist was gradually rising up the mountain-side, and that when we were once on the tops it would have cleared off sufficiently for a very fair view over our ground. The wish, I fear, was father to that thought, and, looking back at the day's work, I now could desire that the thought had had some more substantial progenitor.

As we clambered over the palings into the enclosure that surrounded the stalker's cottage, Charlie himself came out with a most lugubrious but at the same time conciliatory expression. He felt that he had to deal with two young madmen who could venture out in such weather ; for his own sake, therefore, he evidently thought it best to humour us, so far as his powers went, lest, disappointed of our thirst for

blood elsewhere, Daunt and I should make a savage attack upon him, and he accordingly came forward, apologetically rubbing his hands, from which the wet simply poured off, and groaning out : ' Losh me ! it's just waur than useless the day whaiver. It will never be your will to go up the glen to-day. Ye'll just put the deer away and never see them in the mist.'

'Charlie, my man,' said I, with all the grave dignity that my damp appearance would permit me to assume, 'I have the greatest regard for you personally and for your health. But if we are not moving up the Cally Burn in something less than two minutes, I fear there will be trouble.'

Awed by this lordly demeanour, Charlie wasted no more time in speeches, but dragged out the deer-saddle, which we soon hoisted up on to the pony, reluctant though it was to leave the paddock grass, and then we started at first along the burn, but soon leaving it to strike up the slopes of the Hill of Badeney, which on ordinary days gave us our first vantage-ground for spying. But as we climbed higher up the hillsides the mist lay ever more thickly around us till we couldn't see a knoll more than forty yards away. We lay still for an hour and a half at the top in the murky atmosphere and drizzling rain till we were chilled to the bone ; for we were lying on

an exposed face, and the sough of the wild autumn wind played dolefully about our ears, and every now and then athwart the breeze came a wail like that of a lost spirit. It was an awful day.

I had attempted at the first to keep up heart in the party by telling of halcyon days in September, when, after a clear night of frost that had just blackened the potato tops in the fields beside the Isla, the sun had risen in all its splendour over the glen; when far away we could dimly discern the towering peaks of Ben-y-Gloe himself in a mild and misty haze; and how, too, at the close of a glorious day, we had successfully stalked and slain a fine ten-pointer upon the Caenlochan marches against the fence, the westering sun throwing him out into grand relief against the sky. But such reminiscences seemed but to heighten our present discomfort; the contrast between the wet and peaty teller and his tale was all too glaring, and after a while we lapsed into moody silence.

The situation was getting past a joke, and our circulations had stiffened into utter numbness, when we decided to change our tactics and wait no longer. The word was passed: 'Best foot foremost, and downhill again we go, till at any rate we can obtain some pretence of a spy round.' Glad to be moving again, Charlie, with a serene look as of resignation to

great evils, pocketed his damp ineffectual pipe, and led the way at a great pace down the slopes, till we got below the pall of mist and could take a spy in the direction of the White Craig beyond the burn. Though hope is said to spring eternal in the human



Charlie thinks he sees something.

breast, I was pretty well disgusted with my folly in letting Daunt begin forest work on such a day, and after a very cursory glance round with my own glass, I shut it up and began talking as Charlie spied. But after a minute or two I became conscious that the latter's telescope, instead of roving from point to point, was suspiciously stationary upon his knee, and

I cried out, 'What is it now, Charlie? Have you spotted a hillfox or an eagle again, as you did last week, and made me think it was deer that you had in view?'

'Aweel no, sir,' was the leisurely response in a tone that apparently evinced the most complete unconcern; 'it's no that exactly the day. I'm seeing deer at the foot of the White Craig. Tak' the glass yoursel' and have a squint at them. There's deer worth stalking amang yon herd.'

Listlessness and languor fled at the first sound of the stalker's measured words, and I seized the glass from him with sudden recovery of spirits. Far away beneath us across the burn I saw the herd, and as I steadied the glass and strained my eyes I soon made out three fine stags among the deer, their necks now swollen with roaring and their forms gaunt and black with rolling amid the peat-hags, as in 'October month' they delight to do. Dangerously near the mist as our deer were, it did not at present envelope them; and seeing deer at all on such an abominable day gave the old hands fresh courage for the chase, and roused the dormant bloodthirstiness of our novice to fever-heat.

And away we tore down the rest of the slope, nor did we halt till we reached the burn, which was in summer but a tiny stream, but now, swollen with the

rains of autumn, ran down red and turbid in full spate. A little caution in our footing, however, soon put us on the further side with no more adventure than a wetting to our knees, which in our condition then we hardly felt. We went at more sober speed up the opposite face ; but the wind was fair, and the distance reasonable, so that three-quarters of an hour later we were peering cautiously over the last knoll that hid us from view of the White Craig ; but the 'Children of the Mist' were no longer where we had last seen them, and the clouds of white vapour filled the upper air and veiled the higher slopes.

An anxious half-hour followed, lest we had put the deer away by some mischance, without noticing their abrupt departure. But at last there came for a few moments a kindly break in the mist, when the whole atmosphere seemed for a while to lighten, and the mist itself dissolved, as if by magic, into a myriad vaporous wreaths that chased each other across the heathery slopes in an infinite diversity of form ; and ever and anon the Hill of the White Craig stood out clear to view for an instant, only again to be concealed as the ghostly mist-forms hurried by.

Then an angry bellow rang out with a startling suddenness through the chill grey air, and a fine stag stepped down from the higher curtain of mist into the more open air in angry pursuit of one of his

weaker brethren, but soon desisted in deference to the nimbler heels of the young and despicable offender. One by one the whole herd came before our often interrupted view. They were feeding slowly up the slopes towards the mist, and for a while we only saw the rearguard of the herd, some half-dozen of the smaller stags, which kept by themselves for the most part, though now and then they ran in upon the hinds, only to be repulsed by the majestic if short-lived onslaught of one of our three big friends who guarded their joint harem most vigilantly.

One only course was open to us as matters now stood, and that was to follow in upon them as speedily as our legs would take us, before the mist again practically annihilated the deer. And in taking that course we should have to trust to luck rather than to judgment for the avoidance of detection on our way. Charlie, among whose faults indecision cannot be reckoned, started out from the knoll at once, with the rifles well forward and half out of their cases, and, our star being still in the ascendant, we got over some awkward ground without the keen-sighted and ever suspicious hinds noticing that some unwelcome callers were putting in an unlooked-for appearance. A few moments later, and we were but two hundred yards behind the smaller stags, who were just then much agitated and dancing merrily

about the hinds. Amid torrents of rain we then dropped into a peat-drain that put us fifty yards further on the way that we would go, and utterly failed to make us any dirtier than we were before. Three pairs of keen and restless eyes then glowered over the heathery tussocks above the drain, and the



In sight of the deer.

owner of one of the aforesaid pairs became instantly aware of a grand eleven-pointer, if not a 'royal,' standing out alone and barely 150 yards away. He was with infinite care and tenderness endeavouring to aid his rifle in a strategical movement to the front, so as to rest upon a mightily convenient bit of granite,

when a cold breath of wind swept across our faces, and the mist came down like a sheet! Not a deer was to be seen.

‘We’re done!’ ejaculated that poor-spirited Charlie; ‘we may just gae hame at once.’

‘Come on,’ I hissed, ‘come on; run in upon them under cover of the mist, and see if we can’t get our shot yet.’

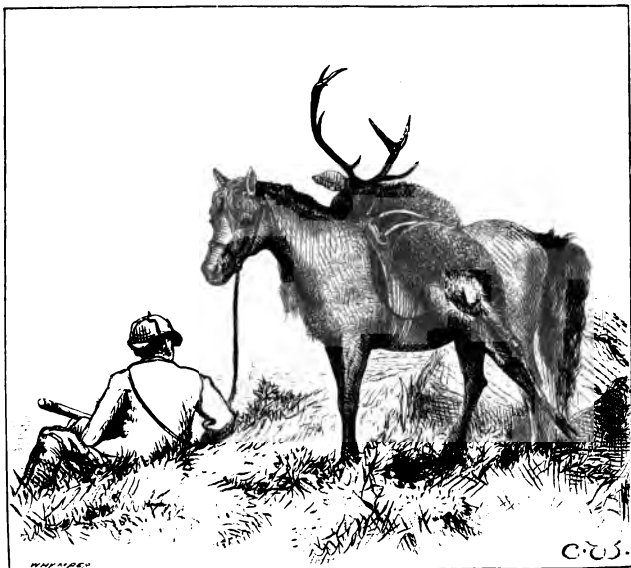
And we rose hastily to our feet, leaped from out the sheltering peat-drain, and made off with all speed that we could muster to the spot where last we had seen the deer. I felt a heavy touch on my shoulder, and ‘Down mon, down! there’s the deer before us noo,’ mutters Charlie hoarsely, not a moment too soon, as three or four moving forms are ‘dimly to be descried’ immediately in front of us.

‘It’s no manner of use,’ he whispers, ‘poking about for stags; just take that nearest one, him with his head up noo and looking this way, though it may be naething but a hind.’

The rifle comes hurriedly forward to my shoulder. There is an almost inaudible click as the hammer is raised, nothing to alarm the now motionless form barely twenty yards away, yet nearly invisible in this uncanny weather. Both my elbows rest beautifully in the heather, and I never took a fairer aim. As the first finger closes softly upon the yielding trigger, and

the hammer falls, a rough hand knocks the barrels upwards, and the bullet screams far up into the air *en route* for Lochnagar, as Charlie, nearly beside himself with rage and the knowledge that he will never hear the last of this adventure, bawls out, 'Dom the whole thing—it's *sheep!*'

A DAY ON SHEEPGROUND



The deer-pony.

A DAY ON SHEEPGROUND.

'It's ridiculous going up there again, Ross. Here have I been to the far end, fifteen miles off home, three days in succession, and never a deer have I seen. It's not as if it were forested ground, and I have no doubt the shepherds have been all over the hill every morning before us.'

So spake I, weary and disgusted, after three days of utter failure, when not a single hind even had con-

descended to relieve the monotony by putting in an appearance ; and I was beginning to feel that the advertisement, 'As it marches with a forest, red deer are frequently seen on the ground,' was but a trap to ensnare the unwary. But Ross, the keeper, would have none of this faintheartedness. 'Oh ! but (very coaxingly said) it's Muster Lennox is the very man for this ground. He's not the one to wait till deer have been seen, but he goes up every day to see them for himself ; and when the grouse are too wild for anything, and the wind is fair for bringing some deer off Allodale, it's never Muster Lennox that will be for staying at home to-morrow. If you do not see deer the one day, the greater the chance the next.'

'Ah, yes ! my friend, that's all very well ; but how about all these last three days, eh ? However (for this wheedling tone was never without its effect upon me), if I must go, I must. I'll breakfast, as before, at seven, and ride up the four miles to the manse by 8.15, and I've no doubt you will be there before me. But I know perfectly well that it's no manner of use.'

With that, Ross and I parted for the night, but in the morning I was as good as my word, and rode up to the manse in good time. Somehow, after doing it so often, the jolting on the rough hill-pony, and rougher deer-saddle, was becoming most particularly

irksome. As I got off the pony the keeper came down from a post of vantage on the hill-face above, but as usual had seen nothing on the near ground across the river Blackwater, and I started off for the steep pull of six long miles to the 'Corrie at the Loch' in a most despondent condition. That corrie was a regular *cul de sac* for a deer, but in my three weeks at Braelangwell we never found a deer at home in it, though there was grand lying in it, with some birch- and rowan-trees. On we went above this corrie, skirting the tops, till we came round the corner of the hill overlooking the very far end of the ground. And there we sat down to glass all the ground that still remained before us.

By this time I was quite listless and dispirited, and the weather seemed inclined to chime in with my mood ; for, after a bright and keen morning, it turned to drizzle and suspicions of mist. Ross, who saw well enough that I was not in the best of tempers, kept the glass applied solemnly to his eye, and said never a word, good or bad. After a silence extending over nearly a quarter of an hour, I looked up from my recumbent position in the heather, and noticed that Ross, who had dropped his glass, and was leisurely filling his pipe, was nevertheless keeping his eyes with great interest on one particular spot in the far horizon.

‘What is it now?’ I said, pettishly. ‘Hang it all, man, you are staring as if you saw a boggart.’

‘Deed, and it’s not that exactly, sir; but I’m thinking there’s deer above the West Wood to-day.’

‘Bless my soul!’ exclaimed I, roused at once to the purest ardour, and snatching up the telescope; ‘if



‘By this time I was quite listless and dispirited.’

that’s what you’re thinking, I wish you wouldn’t keep your thoughts all to yourself. They’re worth more than a penny apiece.’

The glass very soon confirmed Ross’s leisurely utterance. The man was as keen as a razor after deer

and yet he could keep this intelligence to himself for full ten minutes, and I dare say was hugging himself on his superior knowledge. The *sang froid* of a Highlander is full of surprises to the so-called phlegmatic Briton, who can't hold a candle to him.

There, above the wood, where I had stalked and, alas! missed a hind ten days before, the glass showed me eleven deer placidly feeding. At the distance stags were a matter of conjecture, but a herd of deer was an established fact, and there was no more listlessness for 'Muster Lennox' that day.

Now that matters stood upon so good a footing, Ross was inclined to throw cold water on my outspoken exultation.

'Well, sir, the deer's there, no doubt. But it's awful likely they'll be awa' over the march before ever we can get up to them. They are not 200 yards from Allodale now, and they're feeding that way, the brutes! Hech! but I wish we had been upon them two hours sooner. Not but what (added he) it's an ill place to stalk them in, and if we go through the wood below them, we cannot tell what there may be in it; and other deer or even sheep would soon put them away.'

However, these melancholy forebodings were no longer sufficient to upset my thoroughly restored equanimity; and as Ross, whose eyes nevertheless

shone with a new lustre, concluded his gloomy *résumé* of the situation, I could see through the glass first one, and then two more, of the peaceful animals settle down to rest in the heather. One of the herd was not seventy yards from Allodale march, but they had by no means gained sanctuary yet, and those seventy yards meant a good deal to them later on.

‘Come, come, Ross, shut up your gloomy croaking. Some of the deer are lying down now. We’ll just be off, and chance what’s in the middle wood. Deer aren’t so plentiful that we shall disturb another herd in it. And we’ll go canny for the sheep and not startle them.’

We had moved onwards before I had finished speaking, and Ross led the way at a rare pace, first down the steep side of our highest hill, and then, after crossing the Allodale burn, up the next hill-face, till we came into a belt of wood that ran along the slope, with one or two breaks, to within half a mile of the unconscious herd. It was rather trying for us, ‘thridding the sombre boskage of the wood,’ not knowing what might be started before us; and the sheep, too, gave us a good deal of trouble; but when we emerged cautiously from the last clump of birch-trees our eyes at once caught sight of the deer, now all lying down, and gazing towards the forest ground as if there were something in front of them. With

their heads thus turned away from our operations, the rest of the stalk was easy. After the wood our way led up a very broken burn-course and on to a small ridge, which gave us good shelter till we neared the end.

But there, on the top of the ridge, just on the very rock where we meditated planting the rifle, lies a grand old ram ! A hundred yards away he eyes us suspiciously, and as we creep nearer he rises slowly ; but, thank goodness ! his movements are leisurely, and such as to provoke no suspicion in the bosom of the watchful hinds. As we near the fatal rock he kindly relinquishes it altogether in our favour, but with no unseemly haste, and stalks majestically down the hill, rather away from than towards the deer. He could not have done better for us if he had been drilled.

Again our breath comes and goes freely. At last the rifle is poked forward over the rock, and two pairs of keen and restless eyes are slowly elevated behind it. There—fairest of all sights to the stalker's eye—lie the quiet herd of deer in various attitudes of repose, still with their gaze upon the forest ground ; and as we follow the direction of their glance we see another herd about a mile away, and heading right on for our ground. But one lot of deer is quite enough for us, and we soon detect stags among them ; no special heads, I allow, but on sheepground a stag is a stag, be he never such a ' knobber.' To-day we

have two stags of quite a 'grown-up' order before us, one black with rolling among the 'peat-hags,' and displaying a fair head of five points, the other a light-coloured small six-pointer. But the worst of the brutes is, they are on the far side of the hinds, not nearer than 230 yards. Quite apart from the cruelty of shooting such long random shots, the great object on sheepground is to have 'savoury meat' in the bag at all, and venison of any sort will be hailed with 'a tumult of acclaim' down at Braelangwell Lodge.

We have come to the end of our tether, and cannot get a step nearer; so, as a big hind rises lazily at last from her couch in the heather, and begins feeding towards 'us not 150 yards away, the rifle is cautiously brought to bear upon her, and not upon the stag. The quiet of their last twenty-four hours comes to an end with the roar of the 'express' rifle; and, after jumping forward a few paces, the hind, shot through chest and lungs, collapses and dies. The second barrel directed at my black friend is a clean miss; but while Ross is trying to cram in a second brace of cartridges, my heart comes into my mouth, for now the herd of deer, utterly unaware of the side from which the shot has come, after a few moments of hesitation, decide to run in upon the West Wood again, and trot past us broadside at 120 yards.

The light-coloured stag drops stone dead as the first hammer falls, with a bullet through his heart ; but the left-hand bullet, meant for the dark-coloured beast, never reaches its mark. A hind gallops in front of him, and gets what was meant for another. She runs, poor thing, several hundred yards, going slowly and ever more slowly, till she, too, drops down.

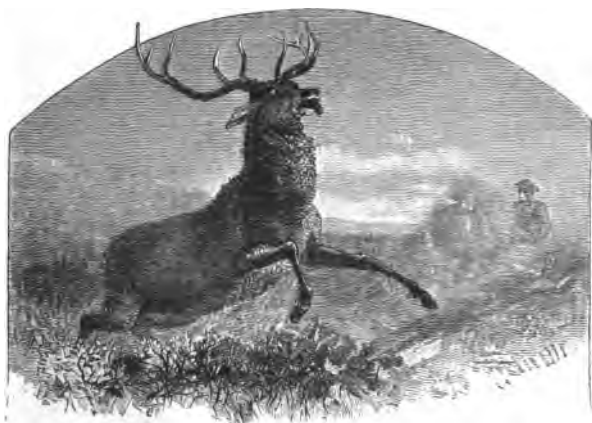
The rain is coming down fast now, and externals are all unpromising ; but our contentment after getting the best stag of the herd, and two good hinds, is a thing to remember for ever, while our mind's eye already sees the triumphant reception at the Lodge when the fifteen miles homewards are compassed. The gralloching of the three deer, and getting the stag on to the pony, which we soon whistled up from the shepherd's shieling down in the glen, were carried out with great expedition ; for the survivors of the herd made over the hill as if towards the corrie at the loch, and my black friend does just a little rankle in my mind. We shall follow up the herd.

Ross goes down a few hundred yards with the pony and gillie, for the former is restive under the deer, snorting and plunging at the start, and needing judicious handling on both sides till he gets more easy in his mind. Left alone amid the torrents of rain, I munch my sandwiches, and calmly think the stalk

over. As I think, my eye is caught by some change on the nearest skyline. Two sticks of burnt heather seem to have come into view on the ridge, but surely they were moving about in a strange fashion for bits of heather when they first caught my attention. As I fall back instinctively behind a knoll, I bring out the faithful glass ; and truly it 'never rains but it pours.' What I noticed are the tips of a good stag's horns, that neither rise nor fall, but remain just on the skyline ; so he must have lain down as soon as he had looked over on to our side. They must be knocking the deer about on the forest to-day to send us more deer across so soon ; I never dreamt of such luck. But here goes, any way. A long pull at the whisky flask, a shrug of my shoulders, as I feel the rain coming inside, and I am off after the latest discovery. The stag before me now is one that Allodale and Deanich, the forests themselves, would not despise ; and my dark friend of the previous herd will remain unmolested at the corrie by the loch, unless time serves for all. Ross soon catches me up as I start on my stealthy march. His own quick eyes had warned him of deer the moment he came back from the pony, though he too had small expectation of another herd.

Getting in upon that stag was as easy a task as could well be set before us. His head is turned

persistently in the direction of the forest, and his hinds, and there are many, the selfish beast has placed all on the forest side of him, for there he thinks the danger lies. So we creep to within 100 yards of him, and get, all unseen, into a perfect position for the shot. It is but 2.30 when we have fairly outwitted him ; it is not till 4.20 that he rises



The Death of the Nine-pointer.

on the shoulder of the hill, and shakes himself like a great dog, after his long afternoon siesta. All the while the rain has fallen, and my fingers are blue with cold, though lying at full length I have kept them under me and in my nether pockets.

Two hours of waiting have quite unnerved me.

Although happy in having three deer already in the bag, yet this is a grander beast by far, a good nine-pointer ; and so when he turns his full broadside and crops a bite of the young heather, I make a poor shot considering the distance, but an effective one, if a man may be judged by results only, for the big stag rolls over and over with the force of the bullet, and can only go twenty yards before a kindly quietus comes from a shot through the neck at close quarters ; but that first shot only just touched his back and broke it ; half an inch higher and the deer would have gone scatheless back to the forest ground again with his hinds.

His consorts, bereft of their lord and master, run past us broadside not fifty yards away ; but for blood merely my thirst is sated, and the trusty barrels ring out no more to-day, though the right and left are well nigh a certainty. Yet how variable a thing is man ! only a week later, when I find that my shots of to-day were destined to be the last chances I should have at Braelangwell, I am found bewailing that I did not knock a couple of hinds over, and send the peat-cart up the glen for half a dozen victims instead of four.

But to-day, at any rate, the cup of my complacency is full to overflowing ; and Ross cannot control his pleasurable emotions all through the long,

long walk home. Every few minutes he keeps recurring to the subject that is uppermost in our minds : ' Eh ! but now, Muster Lennox, what did I tell ye last evening in the gloaming ? I told you to come, for that you were the very man for this ground ; and if you did not see them the one day you would the next. It's grand work whativer.'

THE FORESTING OF STRATHBRACKEN

*THE
FORESTING OF STRATHBRACKEN.*

GENERALLY speaking, there exists in the English mind a certain distaste to the practice of foresting large tracts of ground in Scotland. The objection is a sentimental one, and not politico-economical. It often proceeds from untrue premisses, to land its holders in unsound conclusions. Given some wealthy landowner, who has forested upwards of 40,000 or 50,000 acres, and dispensed with his sheep-farming tenants as their leases have severally fallen in, then a great cry arises about the injustice of the whole proceeding. This miserable plutocrat, it is said, has done it simply for his own pleasure and profit ; he has caused great and immediate misery to the hard-working dwellers in those quiet glens ; he has depopulated the whole country-side, and the rentals he receives from his deer-forest are the price of innocent blood.

But whatever may be the justice of such remarks in any individual case, it can easily be shown that they

do not universally apply. In certain circumstances it is hard for a man to act except in a certain way.

Mr. Duncan Macleod, laird of Strathbracken, was not a plutocrat, but was, in virtue of his lairdship owner of several thousands of acres of steep and rugged moorland that formed one of the spurs of the Monadhliath hills in Inverness-shire—a range of mountains noted alike for the natural advantages they afford to the wild red-deer and also for the scant inducements they hold out to the sheep-farmer. The upper corries are peculiarly bare of vegetation, the nature of the ground is rocky and arid, and in a bad winter the difficulty of keeping the sheep together, or even alive, is immense. In those sharp ravines the snow is wont to drift to a great depth, and many hundred sheep huddled together often fall victims to the suddenness with which the eddying ‘wreath’ comes down upon them.

From his early years Duncan Macleod had been brought up to look to his hill farmer and to his shooting tenant for the main part of his income. Letting the grouse-shooting was annually a subject of keen anxiety, and, as years went by and rentals increased, of great self-congratulation as well. But with the sheep-farm for many years our laird had no trouble at all. Alexander MacBean, his tenant now for twenty years past, was a perfect example of what the thrifty and

hardworking hill farmer ought to be. Beside him dwelt his two equally industrious and keen-sighted shepherds, each in his little shieling ; and the three of them had done well by their sheep. Season after season, year after year, good luck and skill had combined to make success wait upon their efforts. Many a winter came and went, not all of them favourable to his herds, yet MacBean had always avoided irretrievable losses, and paid his rents in full. And till Dame Fortune turned spiteful, and gave her wheel an ugly turn, he had, on the whole, taking one year with another, made sheep-farming pay.

But then came the bitter winters of 1879 and 1880. The first one he tided over. A third of his flock was gone, but he looked hopefully onward to a good lambing season, and a kindlier, more genial winter to follow. He had still paid his rent, but fodder had to be bought to keep the sheep alive ; and now, with his balance at the bank exhausted, he was but ill prepared to encounter a still more serious drain upon his resources. Yet upon him came that second winter with an icy grip that held the land iron-bound for weeks. If ever the temperature rose, snow was the only outcome ; and when that had fallen, frost resumed its cruel sway.

Hoping against hope, fighting where an adversary strong as Death withstood them, MacBean and his

two brave hillmen struggled on, now rescuing a score of sheep from a twelve-foot drift, now losing a hundred at one fell swoop under a very avalanche of snow. And as time went on, and no change occurred in that pitiless weather, even the sheep that they had saved from off the hillside, and now tended daily around their very doors, began to lie down and die one by one. Artificial food was running short, Nature's bounty was all withheld—in this extremity tame animals began to cease the struggle for life.

The red-deer, meanwhile, had forsaken the hillside and the corries of the forest. Grim and gaunt, yet with that intense vitality still burning in them which belongs of right to the wild animal, they struggled on. Unlike the sheep, they were free to wander whithersoever they would, unrestrained by fence and wall. So they took their way down into the lower straths, emboldened by their hunger, till they found more food and warmer shelter in the woodlands, many of them coming right down to the shores of Loch Ness. There the thick birchwood gave them cover from the icy tempest, and sustenance in the tree-bark. Many a time in the lowlands there the report of the poacher's rifle rang out on the keen and frosty air, and royal stags were cut down for the sake of their heads alone. They had wandered far beyond the forester's ken, and a lowland keeper would think little of taking a



‘And now in this rough weather the stags would feed side by side with the sheep.’ *Page 157.*

good head that stress of weather thus put in his way, when he was well enough aware that stuffers in the town would give him a sovereign, or maybe two, for the stately prize.

Deer had always, even in the spring and summer, been the near neighbours of the Strathbracken sheep; and in the early mornings the shepherds would often come upon a small herd feeding out of the forest—for the bite of grass where sheep are grazing is sweeter to the taste than the rank growth upon the forest ground. And now in this rough weather the stags would feed side by side with the sheep upon the knolls that lay nearest to the farmer's house. To such a degree did hunger tame the deer that when the stress of those terrible winters bore upon them most hardly they would barely stand aside from the outgoings and incomings of the farmer and his men, but would gaze with a mute imploring look in their large brown eyes, and then listlessly move some twenty yards away.

But when the kindly warmth of spring was felt again in those ice-bound corries, Alexander MacBean was a ruined man. Still admirable in misfortune, he kept back for himself no more than would suffice to carry him to the New World, there, like many another, to start in life's race again in middle age. Though his heart was well-nigh broken at the thought of

leaving the strath he loved so well, yet his indomitable spirit was not crushed at the loss of all his fortune ; and he did not despair of success under new and happier auspices. What he did feel most keenly was his indebtedness to the kindly laird, for his rents must remain unpaid ; and unless Fortune, fickle goddess, would listen to his wooing when he sought ' fresh woods and pastures new,' that debt would never be made up in this world.

The laird, for his part, mindful of a higher example than that of men, frankly forgave his tenant and friend of twenty years, and then, with a sore heart at the parting and with straitened resources, began to consider his own position. These two winters had shown sheep-farming to be precarious alike for landlord and for tenant. Duncan Macleod could not afford to trifle with the loss of half a year's income. And, indeed, the losses throughout Scotland had been so severe that now no one could be tempted to take up the lease of Strathbracken Farm at anything like the old rental.

No sentimental considerations as to morality of deer-forests *versus* sheep-farming could now be suffered to cloud the laird's mind. There was no question, either, of ' depopulating the country-side,' for the two shepherds would remain as stalkers. Who could be found more fitted for the post ? All day and every

day on the hills they noted the habits of the red-deer as accurately as those of the sheep. They had the eagle's eyesight, and their knowledge of the country was positively startling. The only change, then, would be at the farmhouse, which could now be turned into a roomy shooting-lodge—hitherto Duncan Macleod had given up his own house in the season to the tenant of the grouse-shooting.

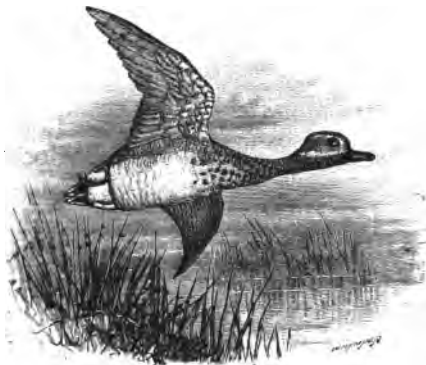
And so the change came about. That summer another deer-forest was advertised as 'now cleared of sheep for the first time, but, from the natural advantages of the ground, calculated to yield fifteen or twenty stags this first season.' Nor, in the event, did this prove to be too glowing a forecast of Strathbracken's prospects under a new departure. The shepherds in their new vocation worked as hard as ever they did in the old days under the farmer, and astonished the lessee of the shootings alike by their endurance of all possible fatigue, their supernatural knowledge of the ground, and their total abstinence from 'the light wine of the country.'

He for his part—no novice in the forest craft—held his rifle like a sportsman, and, as the deer had got so used to the ground in the two rough winters that they now seldom left it, he got some very pretty stalking, and half-a-dozen really very fine heads amongst the slain. The stags of the Monadlia range

are grand, for they are not too numerous as yet, and overstocking has not in that district dwarfed the natural size of the deer.

And so it came to pass as time went on to the end of October, and the shooting tenant, after a not unsuccessful season, prepared for his flight southwards again, that he and Duncan Macleod shook hands with mutual goodwill, and the iaird was left alone for the winter among his deer and barren acres with a lightened heart.

ON LOCH LYDOCH



'The whistle of a teal's wing.'

ON LOCH LYDOCH.

FAR away from the haunts of men, not only from the places where 'merchants most do congregate,' but far even from rude hamlets and shepherds' shielings, we took our lone way over the Moor of Rannoch. The weird, blood-curdling cry of the uneasy curlew, the whistle of a teal's wing, or the brisk crow of the grouse, with now and again the soft bleat of the mountain sheep, alone broke in upon the solemn stillness of the air. Far as eye could reach there were no signs of human life or occupation. No forest ground, such as Glenartney or Lochnagar, is more deserted or more grand than this bleak and awe-inspiring country.

My companion's voice made me start, for, wrapped in the thoughts that such a desolate scene inspired, I had well-nigh fancied myself alone. But he called out joyfully that Loch Lydoch itself, or rather one tiny bay of the lake, had gladdened his sight. For we had come eight miles across the moor from the Barracks Lodge, where the road ended, over a stiff and devious route, and the day had been wonderfully breathless for September. The nearer air flickered and trembled with the intense heat ; the hills loomed indistinct through the glaring haze, with here and there a placid cloud resting upon their bosoms, while the highest peaks of all stood out above the white cloud fleeces, crimson in the sunlight. The stillness in the air and in the heather was almost painful in its prolonged intensity. The human ear barely notices the sounds of everyday experience, and yet is curiously alive to their absence, and strains keenly to catch the hum of insects or bleat of sheep across the moor. It was a day when the leap of a trout in the pools of the river Gauer that ran beside our path or the harsh croak of a raven from the rocky knolls startled the passer-by, for all around was so still.

Perhaps these reflections were borne in upon us with more force afterwards, when we came to look back on the events of the day. For as we neared the

loch, drenched to the skin with moisture, though in fine walking trim, we were mainly thinking that it was a pity we had chosen so scorching a day for fishing the loch.

Angling exploits, as the sun rose higher and persistently grew hotter, seemed out of the question. Yet, as we came in upon the curious sandy beach that fringes Loch Lydoch, we were alike surprised and pleased to find that there was a suspicion of ripple upon its surface. The loch lies so high, and is so exposed and wind-swept from the west, that a breath of wind that would hardly stir the tresses of a beauty's hair will yet prove sufficient to ruffle the surface of that lonely sheet of water.

A kindly, well-intentioned cloud, too, came betwixt the sun and us, as we were stepping into the boat and hauling in the chain. But we were quite unprepared for the brisk way in which the trout rose, considering the small curl on the water, which was little better than a 'cat's-paw' coming and going, leaving portions of the surface as smooth as glass and as clear as crystal. But by rowing here and there, wherever the evanescent ripple could be utilised, we basketed twenty-nine trout in an hour and a half, one a nice fish well on for a pound in weight. Mightily content with the short morning's work, we rowed ashore for our lunch, and were in excellent humour as we smoked

our pipes after it, taking plenty of time for a due appreciation of the Titanic features and rugged beauty of the lone Moor of Rannoch. We have seen a good deal of Scotland in the last twenty years, and we know no part of the country where one feels such an utter and awe-inspiring sense of isolation as by Loch Lydoch's shore. It is not only that the scenery is so wild and desolate, but it is so all-comprehensive. There is no suggestion of an outside world, but our life, with all its joys and sorrows, seems for the nonce to be bounded by that circling sweep of mighty hills that close in upon the near horizon, and allow no suggestion or glimpse of further peaks beyond.

Perhaps my companion was the less poetically minded that day of the two ; anyhow he was the first to break the silence that fell upon us as we watched the smoke curling upwards in the quiet air. 'Duncan,' he called out to the gillie with us, 'it won't do to waste time. As it is, we shall only have a short day of it on the loch ; and see, the ripple is gathering strength.' And without more ado, we soon got afloat once more, and for several hours after that the only sounds that broke the stillness were the swift flashing movements of the rods, the leap of a deluded trout, or the plash of the landing-net in the water as it closed upon its victim. Those Lydoch trout are not, like some young men, painfully shy ; on the contrary,

they meet you quite halfway in any advances that you may make, and several times did we land two trout from a single cast. The morning's sunshine was too bright to last, and the cloudy afternoon, with the warm genial atmosphere and stronger breezes, was most propitious for our sport. By six o'clock, when we had to be thinking of our long trudge back again, we had added eighty-five more to the slain—rather more than nine dozen in all. But, from what we saw of the loch's capabilities, we were quite convinced that if we could have passed the night at the bothy on the moor belonging to the Barracks Lodge, and so made an early start upon the water, we should easily have caught two hundred trout.

As we are not likely to be in that country soon again, let us for once be unselfish, and say, for the benefit of those who may be more favoured, that the most killing flies have yellow or olive-brown bodies, and the teal wing. The angler, too, who is nearest the shore as the boat drifts broadside, generally gets the most rises; for the fish there seem to be pretty well in shore all the way, just beyond the shallows in the deeper water, and beside the numerous sunken rocks and weeds that fringe the shore. In the old days we have seen a fish of $5\frac{3}{4}$ lbs. taken out of Loch Lydoch with fly, and its river, the Gauer, is still more famous for leviathans; but on the day of which we

are speaking our best fish was the one that fell a victim before lunch, no more than a pound in weight. Nor was our heart ever sent into our mouth by the lazy swirl in the water of some monster trout that was not really minded to take our fly. But we could fancy that more stormy weather than that balmy September day would be more likely to set the real monsters of the deep upon the move.

HIND SHOOTING



The Deer's worst Enemy. Page 181.

HIND SHOOTING.

By the middle of October the season for stags in the larger forests is practically over. The law may be relaxed once in a way if the stalker reports some very special 'head' in the glen, and the days of grace have only just commenced. Then perhaps the sportsman, fired by the glimpse that he gets through the telescope of branching antlers and majestic span, insists upon starting on the stalk, and making a last effort for the year to transfer the powerful trophy in the first place to Macleay, the great stuffer of Inverness, and so in due course to his own halls, ancestral or otherwise, as the case may be.

But, speaking generally, when the 15th is over-past, the land has peace so far as the stags are con-

cerned, and then there is nothing left but to pursue the hinds, or go southwards, there to hide one's diminished head among the turnips and the stubbles. The tremendous and varied excitement evoked by stalking antlered 'heads' is certainly wanting, while the weather is apt not to be all that a fastidious and over-discriminating individual could desire, for it is strange indeed if we do not get our first taste of snow in October. Yet to a keen hand, who does not mind the cold, and does appreciate the niceties of the forest craft, picking out a good 'yeld' (or barren) hind in November is very pretty sport.

That the venison is of better quality than that of 'a stag of ten, a hart of grease,' as some do vainly boast, we will not allow for a moment; but of one thing there is no doubt. The hinds do come to their best between October and New Year's Day, even if they never carry the same weight of fat upon their haunches as does a stag when in his prime.

As we have said, the worst of the whole thing is that there is no longer that pleasurable suspense when we suddenly detect a herd of deer upon some distant skyline, or below us in a sheltering corrie, and draw out the glass hastily to look if stags be there. But perhaps there is some compensation, for a malicious pleasure is felt in going out with the express purpose of outwitting some of those infernal hinds (Duncan,

the stalker, would call them by far worse names), who, during the proper stalking season, have often displayed more generalship than we, and have called off the stags at a trot, just when we were hauling the rifles out of their cases, and considered a grand beast as good as in the larder.

There is a dire malignity in the tones and words that the weather-beaten Highlander adopts when he speaks of these poor unselfish brutes. Their patient devotion throughout the livelong day to the interests of their antlered consorts serves but to draw upon their heads the most opprobrious adjectives and unpleasing nouns that are ever heard upon the mountain-side. And so the forester, when once embarked upon the stalk after a hind, displays the utmost ingenuity of which he is capable. It may be coolness and discretion arising from the want of enthusiasm in the lesser quarry; but it looks suspiciously like long-harboured revenge.

When once the small (and therefore more easily accessible) herd has been spotted in the field of the telescope, with evidently two or three good hinds among the deer, how carefully and soberly Duncan does go to work! Even at a long distance with what prudence does he avoid crossing any ridge or skyline that might betray him to their ever-watchful eyes; how slowly and laboriously never raising his

head, he crawls over this last intervening swamp of green moss, which soaks us through and through as we flounder uneasily onwards upon our stomachs, vainly admiring meanwhile the pace that our more active and accustomed leader manages to exhibit, even under these trying circumstances. And when the end of the stalk draws nigh, when the critical moment has arrived, and the fine, dark red animal is not ninety yards away, browsing unconsciously and fairly broadside, he is surely wanting in magnanimity to say, as he most assuredly does, in a voice hoarse and muffled from necessary repression, 'Damn her! I'll have this knife into her in a minute!' The loud roar of the rifle strikes with startling suddenness upon the frosty air, the hind jumps forward, staggers and falls. Duncan is as good as his word, and the *tableau* is brought to a conclusion with the advent of the pony and the deer-saddle.

When the weather has finally broken for the year, when a bewildering snowstorm is raging over the corries, and the snow itself, no longer content with merely giving a picturesque finish to the landscape by whitening the tops of Glas Meal and Lochnagar, lies deep down even in the valley, then there is no doubt it requires some courage to essay the chase undaunted by externals, and the beauty of the sport will hardly be manifest to a sensitive plant.

One day early in December may be worth recalling, more because it was typical of the sport at that time of year than because the incidents were either thrilling or uncommon. The days are short then, and we breakfasted by candle-light, all more or less sleepy, and weightily appalled, as each one's taste, fancy, or wardrobe dictated, in divers waistcoats, extra Cardigan jackets, etc., to keep out the cold, for even by candle-light we could see there was a terrible day awaiting us outside. The window-panes were choked with driving sleet, and a bitter east wind wailed and shrieked up and down the glen. However, it made the hot coffee and a roaring peat fire on the hearth all the pleasanter while it lasted ; and afterwards, with coat-collars turned up, and the possessor of most waistcoats and one pair of knickerbockers put on over another audibly chuckling at the superiority of his equipment, we turned out into the open air just after eight o'clock, for the day's work is over by three p.m., and an early start is requisite to get over the ground.

'Well, Duncan, how's the wind, hey? Pretty well in the east, I should say, from the feel of it. What do you think of our chances of a shot to-day?'

'Aweel, sir, the snow's awful, just awful. The wind's weel enough if you'll face the snow. But I doot if you'll see what you're doing the day, whatever.'

‘Well, well, that’s as it may be. We’re going up the glen, anyway, and as we’re not going to stand talking in this pretty weather, quick march is the word. Is Peter there with the rifles?’

And away up the glen we go. The sharp easterly gale cuts our faces, and drives the snow with malignant energy into our baffled eyes. It strikes on the withered heather like showers of small shot, ever and anon tossing the broken fragments high into the air. As for the snow, it swirls and eddies in graceful wreaths one moment, the next flies before the wind in the form of sleet, and fairly blinds us as we climb painfully onward, leaving the burn, up Finnearty Hill. New to this wintry work, it is all I can do to mind my own footing on the steep hill-face, slippery with the snow, and I leave the task of looking out for deer in such a storm to more experienced eyes than mine. Duncan knows what he is about, and so does Tomline, the younger laird, who is out with us to-day, and is certainly as well qualified to stalk deer as any professional; while I and Clifford, the proprietor of many waistcoats, are content to toil uphill passively, conscious that we are being conducted by scientific experts, who will make no mistakes.

We plough through the worst part of the weather without our leaders throwing themselves headlong into the heather on sight of deer; and, keen as their

eyes are, I doubt if they could see 200 yards away. But as we climb ever higher, and get on to the 'Back of Bawhalps' (which is a mountain in those parts!) the whirling snow becomes less frequent, and at last stops for the day. The wind has either increased in velocity or we feel it more now that we are higher up; but the sun is now fain to put in a faint and watery appear-



'Black and gaunt against the drifted snow.'

ance, and we are all more sanguine and on the alert now that we can see what is doing in the glen. It is a grand drawing wind for deer, and, sure enough, as we pause for a few minutes at the top against the Caenlochan fence, something is seen moving on the further skyline, and our glasses soon proclaim that

something to be deer. A noble picture do they make to-day, black and gaunt against the drifted snow, as they troop down the slopes, seeking shelter from the icy gale in the lowest corries beneath the Hill of the White Craig. They pour in over the far skyline into our ground, first one and then another, till I should judge that fully three hundred of them have galloped into sight. In so large a herd we are sure to find the objects of our search, but getting near them will not, perhaps, be so easy. How grand the stags look trotting onward, with their black horns first topping the horizon, and thrown into singular prominence against the dull grey wintry sky! And even at the distance a sullen bellow is driven athwart our ears by the piercing wind, which cuts up the snow into whirling and reeking spindrifts at our feet.

We shut up the telescope with a sigh, for there is one magnificent ten-pointer that touches our sporting heart in its tenderest fibres. Would that it were early October, with that stag at its best, and pleasantly close to me! For, like Bob Acres, I would say in cases such as these, 'By my valour! then, Sir Lucius, forty yards is a good distance. Odds levels and aims! I say it is a good distance.'

I don't believe in those sporting long shots—'250 yards and stepped it myself, by George!'—and I don't like them. The cruelty is so great with these explosive

bullets, when a poor beast is merely hit and runs away to die in agony. Mr. Horatio Ross (and no better judge of the sport exists) gives 150 yards as the outside distance at which a deer ought to be fired at. It sounds near for the extreme limit ; but a stag is not a clear mark like a Wimbledon target, but stands very indistinct in heather.

But to return to our wintry weather, and to the deer now before us. With three rifles out the plan of attack is simple enough, viz., to get in behind them, practically hem them in on three sides, and keep them before us, if possible, for the rest of the day. With so much snow on the ground, the man despatched on the stalk is least likely to open fire first, for 'invisible' tweed is uncommonly apparent when displayed against wreaths of snow ; and the slopes on which the deer have stopped are too open to give much chance of an approach to reasonable distance. Tom-line, who knows every inch of the ground, is left there by the Caenlochan fence above the Short Brae, thus blocking the western side of the forest, should the deer break out that way. We leave him merrily footing an improvised 'fling,' for he will have cold work waiting for the next two hours before the game is afoot, and thinks he had better resort to artificial methods for keeping up his precious circulation. As we take our way along the tops, one or two lots of

ptarmigan rise before us into the air, looking, in their winter plumage, like a few remaining snow-flakes from this morning's storm. Duncan is to take me on the stalk, and Clifford works right round to the Glenmarkie fence on the east side, under the chaperonage of Peter the gillie.



'One or two lots of ptarmigan rise before us into the air.'

It is all plain sailing for me and the stalker till we come within a quarter of a mile of the herd; and then, as we anticipated, the last crawl would be over a perfectly exposed bit of ground, which in the best of times would be risky, and in the snow is impossible. Duncan looks back over his shoulder with a very significant shrug of disgust and gives it up. 'It's no

manner of use to try it ; and we'll not waste time, for there's none to spare. We must just shift the deer, and try to get our shot later on in the day.'

The alarm, to my chagrin, is soon given, as we rise to our feet and come into full view on the ridge above the deer. The deer stream downwards through the snow, turning finally to the east, after several hesitating tacks in other directions. Peter is too eager, and, forgetful of the betraying snow, brings his charge into an exposed spot, where the leading hind instantly detects him, and leads the herd downhill again across the Cally burn, and then up the Short Brae, right into the face of Tomline. All this time that professor of the art has not been idle. Those watchful steel-blue eyes have noticed every movement of the chase, from our fruitless stalk to Clifford's untimely appearance in the east. No such blunders are to disfigure his work. He has judged his time and distance to a nicety ; and as the deer, now thoroughly frightened, make at full speed for the gap in the Caenlochan fence, they are utterly unaware that their worst enemy is coolly sitting in a peat-drain, utterly concealed from view, within twenty yards of the very gap for which they are making, with a cool smile doubtless playing over his face at having come down so neatly in the nick of time from his post of vantage at the top of the White Craig.

To turn the herd back again into our ground, he takes the leader (which is generally a good hind), as she gallops up to the fence, sending the well-placed bullet through her chest at forty yards, and herself head-over-heels into the snow. Too good a sportsman to 'brown' the herd, as they huddle in one confused brown mass, he never slips his second trigger ; and, with a new leader, the deer soon make their way back into the centre of our ground. Duncan has pressed on as fast as I can follow, and this time I and the herd meet face to face at the burn ; but I am blown and nervous, while the deer are displaying very smart powers of locomotion, and my two bullets leave no victim quivering in the snow. The poor harried deer break into two bodies, one boldly facing us, and seeking safety by doing so, for they vanish on to Clova Forest, whose sportsmen are long gone southwards, and are seen no more. What pleasant creatures they must think us men !

The less wary section of their forces run right into the jaws of our disappointed sheepfence rifle on the east, who is by now all athirst for blood. Peter manages to restrain his fire till they are well up to him ; but then, getting a fair chance, broadside, as they run past one by one, he 'plays' upon them as long as they will let him. Hurrying in that direction—for our own share in the day's sport is assuredly over—we

find he has been rather indiscriminate in his attentions. True, there is a yeld hind lying stiff and cold beside him, and to that he points with triumph ; but there is more to tell. According to his own account, I grieve to say that one big ' head ' quite upset his own ;



Clifford athirst for blood.

and, accordingly, here in December—*horresco referens*—a mangy but well-antlered eight-pointer lies grim and quiet in the snow, useless except for his wide-curving horns. Too excited, moreover, to rightly distinguish his deer, a little further up the corrie

lies a 'knobber,' or stag of the second year, with only two velvety projections between his ears. This case of mistaken identity is a more natural one; and Tomline afterwards allows that he has several times knocked over the leader of a herd; presumably a hind, only to find that the victim is of the male persuasion, with horns too small to attract attention save through the field of a telescope.

However, Clifford grins amiably as I preach sermons on the iniquity of taking stags in December; and as the snow is beginning again, and the offender has a conscience that is none too tender, I bring the striking oration to an untimely conclusion, and we come at our best pace down to Duncan's shieling again in the midst of a storm as vigorous as that of the morning.

Covered with snow from head to foot, with our eyes red and smarting from the needles of sleet that are continually finding their way in, we have yet sucked out no small amusement from the features of the day's sport. We are thankful enough to regain the shelter of the cheerful shooting lodge, but that is natural considering the rough work and running in the snow. There has been a sense of overcoming obstacles in successfully stalking deer on such a day which appeals to the English mind. And if our faces have been somewhat stern-set and determined, with but little sense of

the comic side of it all showing in us till nightfall, it is well to remember that it was no child's play in such a storm, and that we come of the British race, of whom that quaint Froissart, the old chronicler, has written, 'They took their pleasure sadly, after the manner of their nation.'



Finis.

